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THE ROMANTIC WOMAN

BY

MARY BORDEN

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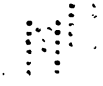

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PART ONE

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CHAPTER ONE

IT was in the middle of dinner at Saracens on the tenth of September two years ago. They were on their way home, the four Americans, and in two separate couples had descended on us, all dreadfully unaware of the surprise in store for them, the surprise of finding each other. Ruffles had been safely staring at Phyllis and Louise for some moments through the branching candelabra. He ended his scrutiny by wickedly rolling his eyes in my direction and saying with more than usual insolence:

"How well you imitate us."

"And how hard we try," I murmured, saying with fatal promptitude what was bitterly in my mind.

"What's that?" growled Jim.

"Ruffles is accusing us of imitating his own, that is, their own decadence ——"

"Oh, I say!" put in Ruffles deprecatingly, cocking an eyebrow.

Jim glared. I expected him to defend his nation, but he was unlike himself that night.

"Only the women," he brought out after a pause with defiant brutality, daring me to snub him for his bad taste in criticizing his wife.

"Yes, I meant the women."

And then they fixed each other with an animosity that seemed to suggest the stirring of dangerous depths. I

dropped my eyes to avoid the sight of Jim's passionate flush, and when I looked up again after an uncomfortable silence I was appalled.

I remember quite distinctly the definite sensation conveyed by the almost audible click in my brain, as I looked up from my plate and as, in that instant, all the broken images that made up for me the impression of the dinner table, slid smoothly together into a new pattern. The change was like the change worked by the turning of a kaleidoscope, and the people who came within range looked as peculiar as though I myself had stood on my head. It was not that I actually became clairvoyant in the middle of the dinner, but that exaggeration is as near as I can get to a truthful statement of the case. It may have been a particularly piercing gasp of enthusiasm from Louise that produced the phenomenon; certainly her shriek of delight as she ogled Lord Britton was startling enough upon strained nerves, to account for anything, but then I hadn't realized that my nerves were strained. However that may be, and whatever the cause of it, they all changed for me in an instant, appeared strangely significant, and tremendously queer, as queer as ghosts and as significant as immortals, angels or devils. They became suddenly immortal souls visible to the eye, and hopelessly entangled in the meshes of the endless past and the more endless future. Their faces and bodies, as much of their bodies as was visible above the tablecloth, looked strange, but not like the faces of strangers, for, at once, that was the point of it, I knew them phenomenally, understood them deeply. It was as though all my life I had been dealing with the dried remains of these people, as though I had been living with a set of mummies, the remains of human beings I had known

centuries before, and as if now we had suddenly been transported back to the time when they were alive.

The moment had a sinister quality, as though it had been blown upon by the breath of very old decayed things, immemorial, transcendent villainies and disappointments. It was like a hard drop of eternity, distilled for me to behold in completeness, out of the vague flood of time. It was complete as a gigantic and perfect crystal in which they were all petrified, and I remember pitying them; for what human figures could appear to advantage against the visible drop-curtain of eternity?

The sight of my plate formed the jumping-off place for my unnatural vision of them. I remember the very ordinary look of it, the bit of discoloured and decayed partridge, an ugly black part of the wing, lying in a little pool of gravy with a shred of lettuce mangled by my fork; and I remember the scarlet cuff of the footman's coat as it came between my eyes and the white cloth while he removed the plate, good scarlet cloth woven on a Scotch loom, sold for three and six a yard, and worn by a well-trained arm; and then I looked down the table and saw Binky as I had never seen him before. I saw Binky with his fine, lined countenance for the first time visibly tinged with depravity. His eyelids drooped, and I remembered the eyelids of the beautiful Duke who had died so inopportunely as far as Binky's love affair was concerned, and I remembered the eyelids of a certain actor who had once played the part of the mad King Charles of France. He, the actor, had plastered his eyelids with white paste — it was a clever make-up. I had never noticed the resemblance before. Binky had always looked to me more or less as he did at the beginning when he came forward

to dazzle me with that vivid bright expression of his, just coloured with sarcasm and apology as though he were constantly saying: "I know the world is supposed to be a beastly place, and I've no business to be happy, but everything is so awfully jolly, you know." He had always seemed to me like that, happy and boyish, in spite of his grey hair and hollow cheeks. I saw him now growing old, beautifully and hopelessly aged, infinitely aged. I saw the extreme sophistication of all his ancestors, and the weariness of all his forests, and the corruption of his mouldering houses waiting to fall on him and do away with his energy and his joy, and make him into just such another as his father or his father's brother. I saw him, too, gently writhing in agony under his perfect raillery, and I knew that he was cursing still the accident that had made him give up that creature beside him. For there actually was Phyllis sitting beside him, quite perfectly lovely, and with her eyes and teeth softly sparkling, and her marvellous hair an aureole of fairness about her slender face. She was dimpling and laughing in spite of her acute regret, her enormous envy, and I recognized her then at last in a flash as the most immortal thing on earth, a perfect coquette; and I hated her, for I saw that she was fond of killing people and tormenting them, and I remembered what Aunt Cora had said to me in her grim way about American women. What was Phyllis doing there, I asked myself, sitting next to Binky, who would have been so glad to have let her devour him, sitting merrily next to Binky, and opposite Claire Hobbes? Phyllis I had loved, and Claire I had disliked and feared for years — for just as many years as I had wanted Binky, but after all Claire had played

the game as she saw it with fairness, and she had a right to despise Phyllis. She was honest in her profanity, at any rate, and daring. She sat as cold and still as an idol, swearing silently to herself. I knew she was swearing and sneering at them both out of her long curious eyes that compelled my reluctant admiration. Nothing could have looked more perfectly finished than Phyllis, but she didn't fool Claire. She was a treasure, a jewel; she would fetch almost any price in a shop that dealt in rare products — and yet Claire knew, and Ruffles knew, what she was. They saw through her, they saw through Louise, they saw through us all. We never could fool them.

But Binky had fooled me, all unconsciously and innocently I knew, but nevertheless truly he had fooled me. I had been finding it out bit by bit for years. When a man's mother and sisters and grandfathers and grandmothers and great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers have all had the habit of being painted by great artists, he acquires a flippant familiarity with such artists. How was I to know, coming straight out of the wilderness, that when Binky talked so easily and gaily of great men and great treasures, men and things we regard with awe on the other side of the Atlantic, that his polish was no evidence whatever of a fine intellect, but just the result of rolling about in a world of treasures, and of rubbing up against a rich background? How was I to know that his excellent taste was not his own, that he really had done his best to spoil it? His household gods had been too much for him; they had kept him by force in the frame that had been meant for him, and there he was high up on the wall for plain people to gape at. Their gaping angered

me. What right had Americans to gape? Clergymen ought to be good — and Americans ought to be democratic. It is a question of living up to one's profession of faith. Binky and Claire and Ruffles, and even dear Molly Tripp, were gazing down their English noses at us, because they knew we were faithless. Phyllis and Louise were obvious, and was I not to be bulked with them, for had I not married Binky? Had I not bought him? Of us all, Pat alone was above and beyond their scorn. Jim was obscure. He puzzled them, but Pat they accepted good-humouredly. Pat, who had been a "Mick" in the streets of Iroquois, he was their peer, and as he sat there waving vague gestures towards them with his huge hands, and rumbling on with his huge voice, he was as removed from them all as a bear too well fed and comfortable to bother about knocking any one down.

I became suddenly weary with the problem of birth and inheritance, of races and the origins of societies. I was bewildered by the vision of our Huguenot, and Dutch, and Irish, and German forefathers. They seemed to crowd up behind my compatriots grimacing and chattering to drown out the sound of their American voices. If Louise and Phyllis would only keep still and let us hear what these ghosts had to say.

I had belonged to them. I had given them up ten years before, and had taken the others on, but they hadn't taken me on. Further, the American lot had grown accustomed to think of me as one of the English. I perceived that I existed nowhere, and belonged to nobody.

Whether the dreadful event that was approaching had actually cast its shadow on that moment I don't

know. I felt no menace of any particular horror; it was merely the fear of knowledge, the shock of so much recognition, that made me go white enough to attract Jim's notice. His was the last face to be crowded into that panorama, for he sat at my right, and I came to it hoping to find him at least looking like the same intelligent dissipated cherub, but he was no more comfortable to the eye than any of them. The beauty was there still, and the innocence, but it was a dreadful innocence, dreadful and desperate, and his flushed face seemed to be set in a last final effort to remember all those things which we together and apart had clung to — and which had kept us clear of degradation.

"What's the matter?" he asked in his suppressed nasal tone.

"Why? — what?"

"You look so funny, a queer colour, whitish."

He leaned forward and stared, deeply, shyly, solicitous, and I looked back at him, not shyly, for I was too tremendously excited to feel shy. I wanted to know once and for all whether it was true, or whether he too had fooled me. His very deep blue eyes are like the eyes of a fierce intelligent angel, and he has a ridiculous curly mouth, a beautiful cupid's bow mouth that would fit a girl to perfection. I took in again the contradictions of his face with its fine, impressive brow and its round, chubby cheeks, and I realized that I loved him terribly, as a ghost might love a man utterly out of reach. He had occupied my mind more persistently and for a longer number of years than any one on earth, except perhaps my father — and it seemed tremendously important that I should know absolutely that I had not been thinking about him inaccurately and romantically.

It was necessary for my sanity and for the composure of my old age that I should know that when I suffered with his suffering I was right about it, not imagining a thing which did not exist, as I had done with Binky and so many others.

"What is it?" he urged again.

"I don't know," I said. "It seems queer — your all being here together. I didn't plan it. It happened. Phyllis invited herself, and so did Louise."

"You don't mean to say you don't want us?" He smiled dimly.

"No. I don't mean that, not so long as you don't cut each other's throats."

He stared, and then decided, too late, to laugh.

"Oh rats — that's all too far off. Pat is perfectly tame now — perfectly tame. He eats out of her hand."

"Ah — but it's not Pat I'm afraid of."

"Who, then?" He leaned back, digging his round chin into his collar.

"At least, not Pat especially, but all of you together."

"Don't you think we know how to behave?" He smiled.

"My dear Jim! It's not that. You know what I mean."

I was saying stupid things, because I wanted to know. I wanted so terribly to know that I was not mistaken about Louise's effect on him.

"You know what I mean," I repeated.

And Louise's voice shrilled down the table. "What is a point to point? You English have such an extraordinary way of talking. A horse race? Why a point to point? What points do you mean?" We both hung there, suspended, as though that voice were a nail that

had nailed us awkwardly, helplessly, flapping against a wall — a blank wall.

But Jim answered me, as he sat up suddenly, reaching for a glass.

"Well then, I don't, and what's more I don't want to." He stared at me dimly, but as he stared his look cleared and hardened. There was no appeal in his eyes. They shut me out completely. If I thought that he was going to give himself or Louise away, there in Binky's house, or anywhere else, I was mistaken. He had brought Louise because she wanted to come. Why she wanted to come, he chose to consider none of his business. He would get through it somehow, and he did not want me to know. He would be ashamed if he thought I knew. So much I read with relief in his face, his obscure passionate face; and in looking at his face I realized that my curious moment had passed.

I was quite normal once more, quite as normal and as lonely as ever. And then Louise shrieked again, and Jim flushed a darker crimson and volently drained his glass of champagne. I had kept no count of his glasses of champagne. His drinking didn't impress me at the time as unusual.

I go back to that moment of that night because if I hadn't had it, with them all fixed in it, so clearly, I should never have been able to understand anything in its relation to anything else sufficiently to attempt to write about it. And I want to write because, now it's all over, and Jim has disappeared for ever, and the others have gone off to the war, Binky and Ruffles, and all the other men in the world — writing this gives me something to do.

Moreover, in thinking over my life I keep coming

back to that moment as to a sort of touchstone. It's not only that I see now how everything even from the beginning, when I was a child in Iroquois, led up to that horrible evening, but that the vision I had at dinner just before the final scene made me a different person, a wiser person — just as truly as the war has made me a quieter person.

The war has made us friends, Binky and me. I am ashamed to say it, but there it is. I am ashamed of being in debt to the greatest horror of all time for my own peace of mind. I am ashamed to admit that the war has done something good for us, because that proves just how dreadfully deep we were in failure. It's an awful thing to think that the tragedy of millions has been a blessing to me, but it is true. It has reduced my life to the simplest terms, it has destroyed all fictitious values and left me with a very few simple ones. I love my children, and I like Binky, and I am glad the war has saved him. He is happy now in the face of all those horrors. When I say he is happy I mean that his soul is enjoying the acute discomfort of his body and the dislocation of his nerves, and the unviolability of his mind in a violated world; I mean that his soul is quiet in the midst of the shuddering convulsions of the universe. It's a splendid thing for a man to keep his will rigid against the raving lunacies let loose by the noise of cannon and the sight of grotesque agonies. Binky, of course, doesn't realize that he is splendid. He talks of doing his job. That is the most English thing I know, that terse denial of heroism and splendid suffering. I sit at home thinking about it.

I believe my cousins-in-law are full of romance and energy. Clementine is on a barge somewhere in a

Flemish mud-puddle making coffee for the Belgians, and Monica is nursing at Le Touquet; but I do nothing. I am too old to delight in calamity. I have entered into middle age, and there seems to be nothing for a decent unprofessional woman to do but perpetuate the race and meditate over her knitting. And so, as I've given Binky an heir long ago, two of them in fact, I am meditating. I am meditating upon the questions of race personality, of inheritance; I am meditating on the vices and virtues of mongrels and thoroughbreds, of civilized people and uncivilized people, and upon the relative beauties of wildernesses and gardens.

I am thinking of how I have misunderstood Binky, and of how he must have misunderstood me. It has taken centuries of discipline to turn out Binky, and it is no wonder that I took long to understand him. I was born in the city of Iroquois. That explains a lot. There is little discipline in Iroquois. It has no history. There has never been a war there. I am a savage, and I look decadent. Ruffles says that is our national charm, the charm of American women. There seems to be something peculiarly seductive about the frail white barbarian clothed in costly laces, who masks her passionate blindness under extreme frivolity. Binky found me like that and succumbed. I know now that it wasn't only the money. I clear him of that accusation. But he didn't understand what it was that attracted him.

We are domesticated creatures, we American women. We love our bonds. We are spoiled and petted, and loaded with jewels, and we are crowned with the assurance of the woman who is born where women are scarce; but all the same we are full of the domestic affection of slaves, and our lives move in the round of simple

primitive passions, such as jealousy, and maternal pride, and the lust of possessions.

No one would have dreamed to have looked at Phyllis and Louise that night, that Phyllis was capable of plotting unspeakable robberies, and indecent self-revelations, all because of her enormous greed, or that Louise could turn her husband into a murderer through the power of her furious jealousy.

So much geography spreads about that dinner table that it seems impossible to give any idea of the pattern of it. And yet there is a very definite pattern, in which Iroquois is linked up with the Afghan frontier and the west of England. And then think of the time it took to arrange that party, fifteen years at least, or perhaps thirty, just the whole of my lifetime. For my life seems to me an interesting affair because of its mistakes, one mistake leading to another inevitably until the whole lot of them produced that final scene that turned Jim into a criminal. For this war isn't the final scene, it's really not in the story at all. The story ended on the tenth of September two years ago.

CHAPTER TWO

IF you can imagine the whole of industrial Manchester, a large slice of the Riviera, most of the East End of London, with half a dozen Polish, Hungarian, and Italian towns thrown into one, and all spread upon a brand new prairie by the side of a lake as big as a sea, you will have an idea of Iroquois, a place of gigantic incongruities and pretensions! And Iroquois is American as no other city in the United States is American. New York is New York, but Iroquois is American; it is gigantic, it is provincial; it has sprouted like a mushroom out of the inexhaustible riches of the prairie; it is more or less exactly in the geographical centre of the United States.

Iroquois is an exciting place. I always think of it as full of wind and noise. In winter the wind tore down the lake shore in hurricanes, screamed round buildings, rattling the windows; and this demoniacal yelling of the wind, together with the crashing of waves on the stone beach, gave a queer sharp distinction to the extreme richness and luxury of my father's house. There is something splendidly perverse in the artificial seashore of the city bordered for twenty miles by sky-scraping office buildings, by clubs, railway stations, hotels and palaces. There is something irrational in the beautiful sweep of that concrete beach built that the wind should not eat away land worth a thousand dollars a bucket, and built so cleverly that it looks for all the

world like the real thing. From a point on the outward curve somewhere opposite the Art School, a grey stone building in the French style of the last century, one gets a view back along the shore, and always I am startled to find there, planted by the shore, no bathing houses, pavilions or boat clubs, but the headquarters of great industrial enterprises, the shops of a complex city's appetites and the palatial mansions of millionaires. My father's house was one of these. It was built of grey stone, in a kind of modified Norman style, with massive walls and a tower and wrought-iron gates shutting off the driveway from the street. A strip of grass with tall trees at regular intervals stretched between the street and the lake. I remember once standing in the library and watching three ships go down in a storm. I take it that a room is built for protection, to shut out the menace of Nature, and enclose us in a lying security. Our palaces in Iroquois weren't very successful refuges. In spite of the damask walls and Persian rugs, one could see ships going down with all hands on board. We kept a life-belt and a coil of rope inside the kitchen door for the rescue of drowning men. I remember on several occasions that one of our kitchen chairs was commandeered for rescue work by a policeman, our special policeman. We rushed out after him once to watch with the crowd while he let it down by the rope over the stone wall to the man struggling there in the icy water. That was before the shelving beach of concrete was built. The stone wall was done away with because the waves continually ate into its foundation, and because the sheer face of it seemed to tempt men to commit suicide by jumping over it. The man whom we watched had apparently jumped over, but had found

death in the icy water too terrible and had changed his mind. He grabbed the chair and was drawn up. Halfway to the top, however, with a convulsive movement, he flung himself back again into the lake. This was repeated four times while the policeman and several members of the crowd shouted encouragement to him through the wind. I didn't see the end, for my governess, spying us from the schoolroom window, had dashed out after us and pulled me away, but Dick managed to elude her, and told me graphically how the "poor geezer" had been tired out at the last and had gone down.

The lake was a constant source of annoyance to the municipality before they granted the money for that very beautiful beach. It ate away the land at one point, and piled up sand at another. Dredges were constantly at work somewhere within view, and just south of our house a great tract of new land was built out into the water. I don't know why; one would have thought there was enough land with the prairie stretching away for ever to the north, west, and south.

The north side, as we called it, ended on the south with the river — a narrow, sluggish stream spanned by innumerable drawbridges, crammed with ships and barges of every description, banked with factories, and warehouses, and saloons. A romantic, filthy stream this river, travelling by slow and devious routes through the dark crowded canyons made by sky-scrapers. One could follow it up by walking across the tops of the close-packed lake craft all the way to little Hell, that cesspool of life where the races of the earth are indistinguishable and the universal brotherhood of man lies stupefied in the mud.

I knew the city. In spite of the fact that my father

was a gentleman and owned a lot of it, I played in the streets. My three brothers and myself and our friends formed a sort of gang, which we called the "Hot Push." The Hot Push gathered itself together every day after school. What became of our governesses I don't know. We, at least, had one, presumably to watch over us and help with our lessons, but if she ever dared come out with us, we gave her the slip heartlessly and disappeared from the sight of the grown-ups until dark. Now that I think of it our fun was harmlessly hedged about with ignored conventions. We had a governess who succeeded in functioning for five minutes before each meal by inspecting hands and faces, and one minute each night in each bedroom when she turned out the light. We had a back yard enclosed by a high stone wall, where we were supposed to play, all safe from tramps, and where the boys very occasionally condescended to do tricks on the horizontal bar that had been put up for them. We had a schoolroom, but always did our lessons in the library in the evenings with my father to help us. In fact my mother's idea of bringing us up had given way to the enthusiasm of American youth, and the Hot Push went its joyful way, unimpeded by parents, attendants, or policemen. Its activities varied with the seasons. In the autumn it played football, built bonfires of dead leaves in the streets, and persecuted tradesmen. In the winter it went skating at the skating rink, or tobogganing in the park, and "hitching" with small sleds up and down the whole length to the north side, behind grocers' or bakers' or milkmen's wagons. In the spring it played "prisoner's base," or baseball, or "hare and hound," and in the summer it disbanded to meet again in the autumn. But, of course, besides these normal pursuits it went

in for all sorts of other things, such as shooting sparrows with sling shots, and cats and mice with air guns. It also built houses in back yards, and steam engines that would go, with machinery from my father's foundry; and then of course it had always on hand the war with the "Micks."

I don't know how it was that I was allowed to share all these good times with my brothers in the streets; it must have had something to do with the spirit of democracy, and with the fact that Iroquois, big as it was, had still something of the quality of a country town. I remember stretches of wooden sidewalk with mushrooms growing between the rotting planks, that we used to pick, cook and eat at the risk of our lives. The numerous vacant lots too, gaping between Venetian palaces and Tudor castles, overgrown with bushes and strewn with tin cans, these were an evidence of the fact that Iroquois was not quite such a finished city as it pretended to be. It was doing its best to convert wooden planks into concrete pavements, and vacant lots into luxurious dwellings, but it seemed to have bitten off more of the prairie than it could conveniently chew up and swallow.

It had managed in the fifty odd years of its life to bring forth or at least allow one gentleman to come into being, but it gave birth to no artist. How could it?

A gentleman was miracle enough. On the other hand, it produced a whole crop of saints. Religious leaders thrive in the wilderness, particularly in a wilderness full of money and noise.

There was no established church in Iroquois, and nothing well-behaved about religion. It was a furiously militant Protestantism that cried loudly in the wilderness,

with no regard for good manners, or good taste. I wish it had not been so. I have a particular grudge against those churches of Iroquois. I wish my mother had not come within their reach. My mother was a lady, a gentle, delicate lady. She ought to have been born in an Italian palace and have gone on pilgrimages to Rome for the saving of her dear soul. It was an exquisite soul, you could tell by her face. She was a mediaeval religieuse, and she was a member of the Ebenezer Sprott Church. Wasn't it tragic that with all her intense religious fervour she could find no fellowship for her spirit save in the Ebenezer Sprott Church? I have always been afraid of religious experience as an incipient drunkard is afraid of drink; nevertheless, in spite of myself, when I was thirteen years old I was "born again." That is what it was called in the Ebenezer Sprott Church; and as it took place there one night during a prayer meeting which was part of a revival, the members of the church ought to know. They saw me at it. My miserable little soul was stripped and exposed to their sanctified curiosity. It is horrible to think of. I shudder at the indecency of it. I can see myself now, a quaking, shivering little girl, rising up in the midst of that heated congregation and confessing my sins in a trembling voice, with a thousand pairs of eyes devouring my shame and my tears; a thousand minds in a state resembling intoxication, praising God for my utter and disgraceful loss of self-control. It is a pitiful sight as I see it now, and the pity of it saves it from a too horrible indecency. I was very young, I couldn't stand up against all the terrible weight of psychic influence that was exerted by those electrified saints. After all, I wasn't so very much to blame for giving in, but mind you, I knew all the time that I was doing an

offensive thing. Even in the midst of that delicious delirium the still small voice of my sane self told me that this was a misdemeanour of a particularly dangerous and disgusting kind. What it amounted to was this: I humiliated myself, I abrogated my will, I surrendered it to an alien influence; and this I take it to be the supreme crime, and to do so publicly the supreme indecency. And the strange thing is, that this surrender of self, this public display of nakedness, is held up by such churches as the Ebenezer Sprott Church as the only way to salvation. They revel in the self-abnegation and in the mortification of the spirit. Their theology is full of expressions about being nothing so that God may be everything, about being dead that He may live, and so on. I suppose, granted a God, one can justify it all logically enough; it's not their logic that I am criticizing. As a matter of fact I'm not trying to criticize them at all. I am merely stating my own experience; and for me, the participation in a spiritual life, thus conducted, was a perversion of my most fundamental instincts. And this is the point of interest, namely, that although I knew this, still, so strong was the religious influence exerted by the church, that I succumbed to it. Possibly I might never have succumbed if I had not been over-emotionalized by other excesses.

Life was full of emotions for the youth of Iroquois. At the age when, doctors and reformers would tell you, young people should be vegetating, I and my friends were in a chronic state of excitement. It seems to me that some one of us was always rushing in upon the others, eyes flashing, hair disordered, breath exhausted, to impart some startling piece of news.

We were excited about our sweethearts, about the "Micks," about the suicides that jumped over the stone

wall into the lake, about our parents and their prohibitions, about God and Sunday-school, about presidential elections, and political parades, and strikes, and murders in the newspapers.

And this excitement, which was a thing in itself, like an electric current, existing in us and in the composition of the city, stirred up our minds to a feverish and perhaps disastrous activity; disastrous because our minds were so empty. We were like little machines driven by a tremendous force, grinding on and on with flying wheels and with no weight to drive, no great task to consume the energy. The efforts of our mothers and our teachers seemed to be exerted to drive us on with morals and ideals, while no one put any facts into our heads. We were taught to take life very seriously, and told nothing about it, nothing more accurate than my mother's statement that it was the gift of God.

It wouldn't be fair to Iroquois to let you think the Ebenezer Sprott Church was the only church in the city. There were hundreds of them, all kinds — Episcopal churches, Congregational, Presbyterian, and Baptist; Christian Science temples, Jewish synagogues, a Roman Catholic Cathedral, a Zionist chapel, where they went in for faith-healing, and, I believe, a Mormon meeting-house, to say nothing of Salvation Army headquarters, and down-town missions for drunkards, and a Buddhist shrine; but the Ebenezer Sprott Church was the place where you heard the Gospel. That was the reason my mother went there. She had left a fashionable church in a storm of protest and gone west to sit among her servants, and everybody else's servants, and bootmakers, and bakers, and laundresses, to hear the Gospel.

I can see her now, sitting in that congregation, severely

but undeniably well clad, surrounded by pimply, untidy, sweaty human beings, her shell-like face turned radiantly to the pulpit where the low-bred man, with a face like a caricature of Michael Angelo's prophet Hosea, propounded the Gospel.

I didn't like the Ebenezer Sprott Church. I didn't like the name, and when I was asked in school where I went to church, I was ashamed to say. I didn't like the smells of all those close-packed bodies, whose habits and pocketbooks involved the use of not quite as much soap and water as I was accustomed to. I didn't like the way they came up to you after service, teary about the eyes, and pressed your hand with radiant smiles and praised the Lord. Of course I know that all this had nothing to do with the divine Gospel which was preached there, but I can't separate the theology of that House of God from its æsthetic envelope. My mother could. She was by nature much more fastidious than I, and yet she could love a greasy woman with bad breath and a jet bonnet, because she was a sister-in-Christ. My mother was wonderful! She was commanded in a certain verse in the New Testament to cherish the saints, and she did; she loved them, all the most pimply ones, and had them home, fed them and clothed them, and let them flop on her. I believe they really were made beautiful and pleasant to her, by the light of her own charity, I mean her love for all Christ's followers.

There were, I confess, things that I liked in the church, but I was ashamed of liking them. I had a weakness for the Reverend Ebenezer Sprott himself. He had bad teeth and hollow cheeks, and a voice like a gong, and when he preached, prancing up and down the platform, his cavernous eyes glowing, and his Adam's apple working, the

terrific emotional impact behind his words made me shiver, deliciously. He would throw out his long, bony hand and shout: "Satan shall be bound a thousand years, but he's not bound now. There he is stalking the streets." It was very exciting. And the singing, too, troubled and moved me. There was a large choir of some fifty men and women, and they sang hymns to waltz tunes, all about the blood of Jesus, and I joined in voluptuously, feeling at the same time both exultation and disgust.

People were always being converted, and going up to the altar and kneeling down in public as a sign that they had found grace. Public exposure was one of the most tried and approved methods of dealing with that flock. The Reverend Ebenezer at the end of every service would call on those who wished to accept Christ to rise and confess their faith. My knees always trembled at this summons, and every Sunday as I watched the wretched creatures who rose and stammered out the secrets of their poor little lives, of how this man had beaten his wife, but by the Grace of God would do it no more, and of how that woman had been too fond of drink, I would blush furiously and hold on to my seat in terror lest the Holy Spirit drag me to my feet. Half a dozen such confessions was in the ordinary course of things, but when the church was struck by a revival, then was the real excitement; then you could hear the life history of a hundred sinners in an hour, except that half a dozen talked at once. I say struck by a revival, because the tumult in that church was like the tumult in a ship that is struck by a storm.

It is difficult to convey to any one who has never witnessed such a phenomenon any idea of its character. Psychologically, I suppose, it is closely akin to the

frenzied obscenities of savage rites. The negro church in America forms an obvious link between the dances about camp-fires in the jungle and such scenes as took place in the Ebenezer Sprott Church. And the fact that these orgies prevail throughout the whole of the United States, dragging with them such people as my mother, only proves my contention that we are savages.

I assure you the whole church would go mad; more or less obviously, more or less dangerously, but anyhow mad. The little wheel of reason in each mind was reversed and set spinning backwards at an accelerated speed. I remember so well the night of my rebirth, how I found myself on my feet, shaking as if I had fever, stammering out something about the sinfulness of my heart. I don't know what actual deeds I confessed, I can't think what my deflected brain could have fastened on, but I remember scores of people round me were sobbing and praising the Lord, and that a suffocating cloud of emotion seemed to fill the room and make me dizzy, and that I believed this somehow must be due to the presence of the Holy Spirit, so I staggered up the aisle to the railing and knelt down beside a man in a sporting checked coat and began to pray and cry.

I don't know how long I was there, but I remember vowing to myself that I would go as a missionary to the heathen, after I had first converted my father and my brothers, and Phyllis, and Louise. While I was kneeling there, some one began the song, "At the cross, at the cross," and I felt during the singing that my heart would burst, that I wanted to die right then and go to heaven, and then suddenly when the song finished I had a vision of myself there, kneeling in the sight of everybody, and

I felt ashamed, but this shame I knew was of the devil, so I stifled it and went on praying to Christ to wash my heart clean.

The result of these revivals is supposed to be the regeneration of character. I don't know whether in the lives of all those affected by the upheaval a greater clarity of mind and righteousness of conduct is evidenced subsequently or not. It is difficult to collect statistics on the point. Did the man who confessed to wife-beating give up beating his wife, and if so, what did he do instead? No one, that I know of, has gone into the psychology of conduct after conversion. It might be an interesting piece of research work; I can only speak for myself. The immediate result of that revivalist prayer meeting was a desire to make converts. A shred of decency left hanging to me kept me off my father, but I tackled Phyllis straight away. I made her read the Bible with me. I made her get down on her knees and pray with me. I reduced her, in fact, with astounding ease to a little piece of religious pulp. She announced herself converted, and promised to read the Bible every morning, a vow which she kept a fortnight. With Louise I was less successful. Her mother interfered and sent me home with a mental box on the ear. As to whether my experience made me any more loving and kind and generous, I couldn't say. It certainly made me more anxious to do right, more self-conscious in conduct, and for a time it acted as a check upon my quest for knowledge; knowledge even came to assume the character of a sinful thing. My mother gave me as a test of the rightness and wrongness of a thing the following maxim. If you are sure that you could do and would do such and such a thing with Jesus if He were actually here, then do it. Well, there was no doubt in my

mind that Jesus would censor a number of books. I felt that I couldn't very well read aloud to Him Tolstoi's "Resurrection," which had been forbidden by my mother anyhow; so I abandoned it in the middle and put it in the fire. Probably this was good. I've an idea that "Resurrection" would be unwholesome reading for a girl of thirteen, particularly an ignorant girl; but if my conscience saved me some unhealthy food, I'm sure the continued excitement of prayer meetings was equally unhealthy. Prayer meetings were my chief dissipation that winter, their hold on me slackening so imperceptibly that my reversion to former freedom came all unexpectedly, with only a slight bump. The experience altogether was like falling in love, giving way to desire, and then gradually getting bored.

CHAPTER THREE

PHYLLIS DAY and Louise Bowers belonged to the "Hot Push," Jim Van Orden, of course, and Tommy Dodge, Sally Comstock, and Gus Brown, and half a dozen others besides my three brothers, Dick, Jerry, and Bud. Phyllis and Louise were my bosom friends. We went to the same school, and during school hours we wrote daily voluminous letters to each other such as sisters might write who had been long separated, and smuggled them across from one desk to another in the covers of textbooks. We met moreover every afternoon as soon after lunch as possible.

I remember one day in the butler's pantry that we had a momentous conversation. We were about the same age — I was twelve. I seem to have rather a vivid idea of what we looked like that day, perhaps because I sat on the sink opposite the square looking-glass where Edward tied his butler's tie. We had on sweaters and tam-o'-shanters, and our long thin legs stuck out from under short woollen skirts. The icebox was open, and we had hauled various eatables out of its depths. We sat with our feet dangling, eating olives, salted almonds, and chocolate cake with a gusto that betokened a perfect confidence in the capacity of our own insides and that of the icebox, that betokened more — an absolute belief in the great American god who gave little girls joy of their stomachs. The chocolate cake was of an exceedingly rich, damp kind, called Devil's food, a special source of gluttonous

joy to Phyllis, who had been known to eat a whole two-pound cake without a sign of discomfiture. One would never have imagined it of Phyllis. None of us looked at all like gluttons. We had alert, restless heads and a nervous vivacity that would have given a stranger the impression that we lived on a special brand of rarefied air. Neither would one have supposed from the way Phyllis dived into the icebox that it was my icebox. I didn't go in for being a hostess. What the gods put in our way we accepted unquestioningly, and enjoyed in common; books, ribbons, pocket-money, food, adventures, secrets, animosities, and loves. We had formed a triangular compact to be "chums" for ever. That there were forces at work already, to tear us asunder, we were blissfully unaware. The house was nice, we knew, and large, a glorious place for hide-and-seek on wet days, a place of innumerable rooms and cupboards, of romantic cellars, coal-bins and back stairs. That it represented great wealth was none of our affair. We had the vaguest ideas about wealth. We had the vaguest ideas about every prosaic thing. That our parents were, comparatively speaking, strangers did not concern us. The things, indeed, that did not concern us were legion.

We realized that Phyllis was handicapped in life because Mrs. Day's cook was continually leaving. Phyllis often had to cook the dinner. This gave her dignity in our eyes. We envied her skill with pots and pans. We considered her power in the little dark kitchen in Oak Street wonderful.

The fact that our three mothers sent us to the same school is significant; it is what Ruffles would call "one in the eye" for Iroquois. Ruffles once spent three days in Iroquois. He was greatly impressed by the elevated rail-

roads and the number of "candy stores." He to this day talks of the "candy stores of Iroquois." But what I started to say was that Miss Broadwood's Private School for Girls places the social system of Iroquois definitely, places it rather nearer to the camps of Iroquois' pioneer settlers than it would like to admit. My mother never dreamed of educating me at home; Mrs. Bowers dreamed of it because she had heard that all good families in England did this with their daughters, and Mrs. Day, the poverty-soured, heart-sick woman shut out from Society, looked upon Phil's entrance into Miss Broadwood's as a triumph. It was a triumph, a triumph over little dreadful obstacles such as grocer's bills, rent, clothes, and Mr. Day's obstinate worry. It would have been much easier to let Phyllis go to the public school, where one got a better education for nothing, but Mrs. Day had her dreams and ambitions, dreams that made her heart beat fitfully as she sat in her window sewing ceaselessly, and thinking of Phyllis's dimples.

We knew nothing of all this. Phyllis was certainly the prettiest of the three and the most alluring. She was always laughing. Her teeth were white and shining, and her delicate nose quivered when she laughed, while dimples came in her slender cheeks. Her hair was the colour of sunlight and her eyes blue, with long golden lashes that curled up at the ends. She had a sparkling, scrawny loveliness, and never seemed to care about anything, just laughed and screwed up her nose and floated away from trouble.

Louise looked stiff beside her, but had a proud, disdainful air that carried her through most situations with success. When she thought about herself, she was usually prim or elaborately enthusiastic, but often under our influ-

ence, she succumbed to being nice and jolly. Nevertheless, in her most hoydenish and abandoned moments, her hair, which was crinkly, bushy hair, maintained its compact mass of thick curls unruffled, and there was always a kind of smart daintiness about her. Louise was the most "brought up" of us. She already bore her mother's stamp.

I held the other two together. I believed that they must love each other, and so they did. They both gave in to me. It was I who had insisted on our all tattooing our arms by means of needles and ink, as a badge of undying friendship. Phyllis had sniffed and pooh-poohed, but had agreed half amused. Louise had gone ahead doggedly pricking and scratching, wondering what on earth her mother would say. I alone had really enjoyed it, the self-inflicted torture, and the high sentiment of the thing.

Phyllis had no use for me when I was in what she called a "sloppy" mood. She was always teasing me about Jim. Boys were the same as girls to Phyllis, only more fun. She never dreamed about them at night, or carried a photograph of one in the back of her watch. She was more worldly-wise than Louise and I. The close quarters of the little house in Oak Street had taught her things; and her mother, with no one else to talk to, treated her much of the time as an equal. She had made up her mind already that she would marry a man with heaps of money, and although she was as full of caresses and terms of endearment as a kitten is full of purring sounds, she didn't think much about loving people. To have a good time was all she wanted. It astonished her that I should be always getting wrought-up about people, and dreams, and right and wrong. Poverty was the only thing she

hated. Already, beneath her sparkling vivacity, a layer of hardness was beginning to form.

"One I love,
Two I love,
Three I love, I say;
Four I love with all my heart,
Five I cast away,
Six he loves——

"Six he loves," I repeated, gazing at the apple seeds in my sticky palm.

"Rats!" muttered Phyllis.

"You've missed one," said Louise.

"Oh, so I have." I flushed. Not for worlds would I deceive myself about the number of those seeds, but I would eat another apple and count again. And while my teeth set to work, my mind was occupied with the vision of a young man, a young man of fourteen in his first suit of long trousers, and with the secret of his affections that somehow was hidden away in the core of that apple.

We each had a special boy friend, a beau. Dick, my eldest brother, was sweet on Louise; Tommy Dodge, who was a very fat boy with a comic lisp and an inordinate appetite for candy, belonged to Phyllis. Phyllis tolerated him because he was funny, but I'm sure she never let him kiss her.

Affairs of the heart occurred early among the youth of Iroquois. Girls and boys playing together, skating, romping, walking to school, would suddenly see each other in romantic high-lights; hearts would thrill, imaginations be touched. Shy, sullen boys' eyes would express, suddenly, reverence and sentiment where before had been contempt. Photographs would change hands. Sometimes on Saturday nights a number of shame-faced youths

would go to Brinckman's flower store and buy the flowers left over at the week's end, buy them cheap to be sure, but pay for them from weekly allowances and present them sheepishly or with assumed nonchalance to thrilling maidens. Romantic, delicious affairs were these, clothed by the girls in all the language of grand passion, ornamented with vague high-sounding phrases borrowed from novels half-understood, or from the conversation of adults even less comprehensible.

I was twelve years old, and considered myself seriously in love. I was consumed with the delicious pain of exalted emotion. My mind was filled with enthusiasm for life, crowded with beautiful memories, of music and pictures, and travels to strange places. But I knew nothing about sex. Wrapped in an impenetrable garb of romantic ignorance, I had dashed through childhood with my brothers, joyous and sad, jolly or sentimental, vague, wondering, untainted. And something about me, pride or sensitiveness, or innocence, kept the tongues of less innocent children still in my presence.

"Would you marry him, if he asked you?" questioned Louise.

I flushed again.

"Yes," I said at last.

Phyllis grunted. "If I were you, I'd make up my mind to marry a duke," she said abruptly.

I gazed at her. The idea struck me as rather exciting.

"You probably will," went on Phyllis. "Mother said so." This was a revelation. That Mrs. Day even thought about me was strange. We sat silent, eating languidly now; and thinking. It occurred to me for the first time that we might not, after all, be friends for ever.

"I am going to a French convent next year, or the year after," announced Louise at last. She heaved a rather affected sigh.

"Oh, Loo, how dreadful!" I gasped.

"You'll have nothing but dried fish to eat," said Phyllis; "and there'll be a window in your door so that the nuns can look into your bedroom at any time of day or night."

Louise had hoped to be the centre of envy. This was disappointing.

"I shall probably become a Catholic," she ventured tragically.

"And kiss the Pope's toe," giggled Phyllis. Louise frowned. I felt that things were getting rather strained.

"I suppose we'll all be separated for years and years," I put in very earnestly; "but we'll never, never give up being chums whatever our destinies." I tossed my hair from my shoulders, and my face no doubt shone with the vision of the future. Phyllis looked at me sidewise out of her bright, sceptic eyes.

"Destinies," she echoed, sniffing. "Gee whiz." She giggled. Her delicious lips curved, sweet and impudent.

"Marriage I suppose she means," said Louise importantly. She had a way of explaining people to themselves. "When I'm married I shall have twelve bridesmaids, and Joan will be maid of honour. You'll all have pink chiffon dresses with silver lace."

"Pink isn't becoming to me," said Phil, "nor to Joan either. Her hair's too reddy."

Louise looked troubled. She fought her desire for pink chiffon. She scrutinized me. "Joan's hair's not red, it's purple."

"Gosh, you are silly — purple hair!"

"Well, it is. Just you look."

I looked in Edward's glass. "It's the colour of the sideboard."

"Mahogany hair," giggled Phil, trying to stuff down a last bit of cake. "Anyhow I won't wear pink—besides, I may be married first."

There was a sound of some one falling up the back stairs, and in another minute a small red boy burst into the pantry, his eyes ablaze. It was Jerry.

Dear Jerry, he has always been the ugliest creature on God's earth. He was ugly as a small boy, he was ugly as a youth, and he is ugly as a man. His hair is a pale sandy red, not a flaming shouting red like Pat's. His face is red too, and speckled all over with large freckles. His mouth is very wide. In repose he has a timid, mournful expression, and when he grins the change is so startling that it makes you laugh. He is always grinning and making you laugh. He has only one beauty, a very nice white set of teeth.

Dear Jerry. He was the youngest and we all bullied him unmercifully, and he has paid us all back with years of faithful kindness. It was only three months ago that he came to see me, all the way from Iroquois to London, to comfort me when Binky went to the war. Dear believing Jerry. I've never told him anything about Binky and me. I couldn't.

"Come on, you girls; something doing," he spluttered, and disappeared again.

We were after him in a flash. The icebox was left open with remnants of cake strewn about. We pulled on our woollen gloves as we hurled ourselves out of the front door. A gust of icy air rushed into the warm hall, the door closed with a bang.

Jerry talked in jerks as we ran along. His youth and insignificance were outweighed for the moment by the immensity of his news.

"There's a fight. The 'Micks'—the whole gang—in the vacant lot on Oak Street. Dick's got a black eye already. Began coming out of school."

We sped on.

MacAvoy's school was the masculine twin of Miss Broadwood's. My brothers, and Jim Van Orden, and Gus, and Tommy Dodge, and all the rest of the crowd went there. Next door to it was the public school, the home of free education, and the headquarters of an army hard to characterize, a vast heterogeneous rabble of boys, differentiated from MacAvoy's boys by subtle yet unmistakable signs. It was not that they were all poor and the others all rich, though that might have been the slipshod judgment of a casual observer. Some of them were sons of well-to-do families enough. Their fathers kept shops and hotels, managed street railways, paved streets, butchered cattle, bossed political parties, and in fact ran the town; but they were not gentlemen. They had names like Zimmerman, Weinburger, O'Sullivan, O'Brien, Eikenstein, Brodovsky, Chenelli; American citizens certainly, most aggressively so. They chose the Mayor and the City Government, and out of their number many a senator had gone to the White House. Down town in offices or at restaurants they met such men as John J. Fairfax and Harry Van Orden and Charlie Bowers, but never did they enter the homes or the clubs of these men. And they didn't want to. They had a world of their own, beer-gardens, ball-rooms, synagogues and churches, German or Catholic, but for all their palatial clubs their sons were "Micks" in the

minds of MacAvoy's boys, and knew it, admitting the appellation savagely.

How the public schoolboys had come to be called "Micks" I don't know, but "Micks" they were, and they waged incessant guerilla warfare on the gentlemen's sons who studied the same books next door.

There was no special reason, unless it was for the possession of the street, for the fights that took place; yet fights there always were, more or less. The two schools let out at the same time, and there was a constant dispute as to "the right of way" to Kranz's German Bakery, where thousands of pies and cakes appeared and disappeared daily.

It seemed almost as though this red-handed, gloveless Irish-German-Jew-and-Yankee rabble had vowed not only to deprive the "Softies" of pumpkin pies, but to drive them off the earth altogether.

And the "Softies," while looking extremely neat and fair in comparison with the flaring reds and dusky browns of the rougher lot, were still far from deserving the title. They numbered those who were past-masters in the art of fist fights, notably Dick Fairfax and Jim Van Orden. None of the "Micks" was a match for these two, except Pat O'Brien, the leader of the gang.

Pat O'Brien was a figure terrible and thrilling to us. We quaked when we saw him slouching down the street plotting unspeakable things, his hands in his pockets, his heavy jaws thrust into the muffler round his neck. His cap was always pulled over one eye, and he sneered at us as he passed. We didn't know where he lived, but we imagined somewhere on Grant Street over a saloon, perhaps, because he frequented saloons. It was a fearsome thing to watch him dive through the

swaying doors of a saloon. We imagined him drinking beer with ugly full-grown men. Sometimes he smoked cigarettes, which gave him a sinister, devilish air, inspiring awe as well as antagonism in our hearts. Probably he was not more than fourteen, but he was bigger than the others and had the ponderous swagger of a man who owned the earth. The finishing touch to his exciting ugly portrait had been given when I learned about the pistol. He had pulled it out of his pocket in an alley.

I fled along behind Jerry, my heart in my mouth. Phyllis was laughing and gasping for breath. How could she laugh? Even Louise's disdainful blue eyes shone with terrified anticipation. Turning a corner, we came suddenly on the battle-ground.

The vacant lot, as a rule bare of everything save scraggy bushes and tin cans, was swarming with boys, and in the centre of the mob was a cleared space, and in this space a double fight was going on between Patrick O'Brien, another "Mick," Dick and Jim — Dick was my eldest brother. Silently, furiously they lunged as one another's fists flashed in and out, crashed against jaws and noses. Blood was trickling down Jim's face.

We three girls, having wedged our way through the crowd of boys, stood fascinated. We were seized with exultation. Jim and Dick weren't half the size of the other two, but they fought better. The thirst for blood was in our hearts.

"Go it! Go it!" we whispered fiercely.

Great and beautiful stone houses in French and Italian and English architecture rose on three sides of the lot, and on the fourth side was the drive and the lake front. Some day the frozen ground of the lot itself would

bring forth a mansion fit for a king. It was a cold, dull day, sharpened by an icy wind. A wave dashed now and then high into the air. No one thought of parents. Even Louise had forgotten her ladylike demeanour. "Go it! Go it!" she was muttering again and again, her fists clenched.

Jim's face, at ordinary times as pretty as a baby's, was smeared with blood and dirt. One eye was bulging visibly. His thick gold hair stood up stiff in the wind, and his curved mouth was set in absurd grimness. This way and that his thin body bent, dodged, ducked, swayed, while his feet danced ceaselessly, scraping the frozen ground; and his fists shot in and out. Dick's nose was bleeding profusely. His lunging was more wild than Jim's deft, clean movements, but then his antagonist was the fearful Pat, who snorted like a fiery dragon, muttering horribly, and hammering relentlessly with huge fists. And all around stood ragged boys and clean, well-dressed boys silently intent, only now and then moved to shout for their champions.

But there was a sudden alarm.

"The copper!" yelled a voice. A policeman was sighted in the distance.

Instantly the crowd demobilized. The girls were swamped where they stood. A wild rushing rabble of boys swept us along, and by the time the policeman reached the spot not a sign of life was to be seen; nothing but tin cans and trampled bushes and bare, frozen ground.

I found myself pelting down an alley, a hand on either side grabbing an elbow to help me along. Vaguely I realized that my two aids were Jim and Dick, and that we were being pursued not by the policeman, but by the

"Micks." I ran faster, incredibly faster. A stone hit me on the back, hurting between the shoulder-blades.

"This way," muttered Jim. His mouth was set. He breathed hard. A trickle of blood had congealed on his cheek. How I adored him! The back yards of a row of houses opened doors into the alley. We burst through one of these doors into a yard. Yells followed us. We scrambled up some kitchen steps, what steps of what house we did not know. The kitchen door was locked, and the "Micks" were pouring into the yard. They were armed with stones, and they snarled, jeered, and yelled tauntingly.

"Go home to your ma."

"Run, tootsey wootsey, run."

"You're a rummie geezer, you are."

For one instant I stood exultant, looking down on them. "This," I said to myself, "must have been the way Marie Antoinette felt when she faced the mob at Versailles.

Then the kitchen door burst open and we fell into safety.

CHAPTER FOUR

MY father and mother loved each other.

I don't want to modify that statement. I should like it to stand as a challenge or an article of faith.

My father was a silent man. He talked when it was necessary, or on the rare occasions when he wanted to. His silence was definite and profound. One couldn't tell whether he was listening to the people about him or not, and it took a deal of courage to break through his reserve. He seemed to carry with him a stern stillness, sensible even in the street or on a crowded tram-car. People never seemed to get near him. He had a flowing moustache, and it was a habit of his when thinking to pull the plumes of his moustache with his hand, absently, first on one side then on the other. A smile from him was startling, as startling to me when I was a child as if a General had suddenly turned his eyes from surveying a vast and puzzling battlefield, to greet me affectionately. There was something military in his appearance, in the flare of the moustache and the square set of the shoulders and the erectness of his carriage.

He was strangely isolated. I didn't understand it in those days, but I think I do now. It was simply the isolation of refinement. There were three million people in Iroquois, but he was the only gentleman. Charlie

Bowers couldn't be called a gentleman, he was too much like a draper's assistant. Mrs. Charlie had done her best to make him one, but it was like most of her efforts, rather a bad imitation. Mr. Van Orden came near it, but when he was drunk he was not. Besides this he was too charming, too jovial. He didn't weigh enough. I seem to have gathered an impression somehow during my youth in Iroquois that when strangers came to the city they were shown my father as one of the sights. Probably he was unaware of this. It was impossible to tell of what he was aware. Perhaps my own impression was mistaken, and based merely on the fact that conducted tours in large motors would stop outside the house while a courier shouted through a megaphone that this was the "magnificent residence of John J. Fairfax, millionaire." Of course I knew vaguely as a child that he was very rich, but that fact didn't seem to matter. There was no chink of money in the house, and no one talked about what things cost. It was all taken for granted, and that reminds me of a remark of his, one night when he quite unexpectedly talked to me.

We were in London. It was a week or two before my wedding. I remember how he stood in the drawing-room of the house he had taken for me in Arlington Street. We, he and I, had been giving a dinner, and our guests had gone, leaving the room with that vast disarranged emptiness that follows such a crowded couple of hours. Binky had been there, of course, and a number of Binky's relatives; but I had felt all the evening tremendously conscious of my father. His personality had been for me on that occasion, as on all the other occasions during that season that were

for me ordeals of one kind or another, a splendid guarantee. He had given me, simply by being what he was, an immense backing, had lent to me social weight, equal to weighing them all down. I had had actually, that night, a sensation of our having tipped up their side of the scale so high that their position was almost precarious. He was so clearly one of the "great people." I had seen them, these strangers, come into view with their rather frightening array of coronets, not worn, but nevertheless obvious, and immediately dwindle in his presence, until I was no longer afraid.

He stood in front of the Georgian fireplace, his hands clasped behind him, his head slightly bowed, and I sat by an open window waiting for him to say something and wondering what life would be without him, wondering whether I wouldn't spin about like a ridiculous flying machine with no pilot and no ballast; as indeed I all too immediately began to do.

"Where the English have an advantage over the Americans, is in the number of things they can take for granted."

When he spoke, I looked back from the dim vista of the green park into the large and brilliant room with him in the centre of it, surprised. A question at once presented itself. If the English scored because of what they could take for granted, hadn't he scored above them all because of the same thing? They had not so taken him, certainly, but he, on the contrary, had so accepted them, the whole lot of them, bulked together. He had surprised them. They had had to adjust themselves and play up to him. American millionaires they had, of course, been long accustomed to, but their more or less disguised antics that evening had proved to me that

even they had felt that his being a millionaire was quite incidental to his greatness. It was as though they had been invited to meet at a shooting-box the best gun in Scotland, and had all unprepared come upon the King. I had been watching him and his effect on them, amused. He had felt for my sake that it was necessary to talk, and he had handed Aunt Cora down to dinner very gently and gravely, and had proceeded to say six or ten words to her, six or ten words that were profoundly the right words. I saw him looking at her as from a great distance with that fine modesty of his, all unconscious of the effect he was producing, and that has lasted to this day. If I had not fully appreciated it before, I did finally that night when she took me in her arms and let me cry there after I had come back from that last trip to Iroquois. I am sure that the number of times when Aunt Cora had taken some one in her arms could be counted on her thumbs. It wasn't because of me she did it, but because of him. It was always because of him that she was kind to me.

Where did he get it, his grand simplicity? How did he come to exist in Iroquois? I don't know, but I do know that what he was, he was by virtue of himself. Even had he raked up the bits of his family tree and discovered it to be rooted in illustrious soil, that would not have explained. The American climate can obliterate type in a wink of time — time I mean as the evolution of races is measured. What he had learned, he had learned with great effort. His mind was full of knowledge carefully gathered and fastidiously selected. And this dignity of his manner was just the perfectly smooth expression of his mind.

I cannot imagine my father discussing the subject of

marriage. It never entered into his head that there was any such subject. My mother was not for him one of a world of married women, she was the centre of the universe. That was all. It would have been impossible for him to analyse their relationship. There was nothing to analyse.

Domestic bliss is a horrid phrase and a dreadful misstatement as far as they were concerned. If two highly organized human beings care enough for each other to live unashamed and without subterfuge full in the light of each other's eyes, for a period of years, such an experience can hardly be described with an epithet. My father and mother were nervous about each other. There was friction sometimes, there were troubles, there were periods of strain which were evident even to me. When he lost his temper we were terrified. I can't remember his ever being actually angry with her, but it seemed as though she were the one who suffered most wherever his anger was directed. I remember one night his going up the stairs two steps at a time with a cane in his hand. Dick was the offender upstairs. My mother stood at the bottom, trembling, her face white, her hands twisted together. Once I dashed into her boudoir to find her standing crying with his arms about her. "I can't bear it, John dear, when you do. I can't bear it," and he was comforting and reassuring her. I don't, of course, know what it was about, but I knew then that she demanded a great deal of him, expected him always to be wonderful to her, and would never let their relationship lapse into anything second-rate. They had entered very seriously upon the supreme social adventure, abandoned or never attempted by ninety-nine people out of a hundred because it is too strenuous.

He was in love with her always until she died, in love with her as he had been at the beginning, with the same shyness and the same reverence.

And we were at the same time very important to them, my brothers, I mean, and myself. We were allowed to absorb their time, limit their activities, and destroy their social life. Probably they didn't care for the social life of Iroquois — at any rate they gave it up in great measure for us.

The house was overrun with us. A hundred and fifty white mice lived in a village of starch boxes in the attic. Electric wire for strange purposes intersected under every rug and carpet. School books were piled about in the library, bicycles and skates and baseball bats and boxing-gloves filled the cloak-room under the stairs, a punching bag was suspended from the ceiling in the upstairs hall, dogs inhabited the basement and the back yard. It took an army of servants to clean up after us, an army of carefully selected servants with patience and a sense of humour. We must have been a frightful nuisance, but we weren't told so, and were never handed over to governesses or tutors for disciplining.

My father and mother were in the habit of dining with us at seven o'clock, and if three of our four pairs of hands looked grimy against the white damask cloth, no one seemed to mind, unless it was myself. I became in the evening, with the donning of my white dress and patent-leather pumps, a lady, who turned up her nose disdainfully at the sight of rapid shovelling forks.

It was not that the boys were unwashed. Their goodwill and the respect which dinner commanded were evidenced by clean collars, wet hair, slicked down from a

middle parting, and shining faces. Their hands were raw with scrubbing, pumice-stone and cornmeal were often resorted to when soap failed, and more than this proof of a sincere purpose my mother did not demand. My mother was wise, she understood boys. It was a constant source of wonderment to me that she, with all her exquisite elegance and her extreme moral fervour, could smile upon black finger-nails and the noisy supping of soup. She could accept a black eye with a smile and no questions asked, but a rude word or a fib would involve serious consequences, unhappiness to her and to us because of her, so that our remorse was usually mixed with, if not actually caused by, our sympathy with her pain.

But in spite of all this freedom allowed to us, a certain formality prevailed in the evenings. My father had a taste for ceremony that did not entirely give way to the demands of a boisterous family. He invariably dressed for dinner, an unusual thing in the bosom of an Iroquois family. The meal, served with unnoticeable skill by two waitresses in stiff white caps and aprons, was plain, but complete and perfect of its kind. The cut-glass tumblers were filled with ice-water that made a musical clinking sound as it came out of the heavy silver pitcher; the bread was cut in small cubes, and there were olives with the soup. No wine was served, and my father carved the roast himself, dealing out second and third helpings with a detached skill and liberality.

My mother was a beautiful woman. Her friends used to look me over critically, shake their heads encouragingly and say: "No, my dear, you'll never be the beauty your mother was." My looks have always been a subject

for controversy, but about my mother's there was never any doubt. Every one admitted instantly, at first sight, once and for all, that she was exquisite. She was as clear and definite and shining as though made out of mother-of-pearl. There was no flaw in the line of her nose or her arched eye-brow, or her low forehead with its delicately defined widow's peak of dense auburn hair. And on her face there was sometimes a peculiar radiance that would have marked her out from all other women, even had she been plain. I know now what radiance meant. It meant conflict. It was a costly thing, that radiance on her face. It was as costly as diamonds. It had cost endless hours of suffering and prayer. It was the witness of a human mind that willed to do God's will. My German governess once said to me about my mother: "Sie arbeitet so an ihre Seele." It was true. My mother laboured endlessly for the perfecting of her soul, laboured in prayer, in fasting, in deeds of charity. And this radiance that used to light up her face frightened me because I knew what it meant, and I knew how terribly hard it would be for me to attain it. Secretly I longed to be like her, and rebelled against the awful effort it involved.

Of course we didn't understand her. She looked fragile and luxurious like a hot-house flower. To please my father she dressed in rich brocades and old lace. At a casual glance, she looked as though she never read the Bible or said her prayers, as though she never lifted a pink tapering finger to discipline those noisy bursting sons who adored her. When we looked at her frail, richly-clad figure, at her gleaming auburn hair, and her large, brown, wistful eyes, we were moved to a kind of protective adoration. We wanted to fondle and kiss

and purr over her, and often, if she were not exercised about the salvation of our souls, she allowed us to make demonstrations of affection, drinking in our kisses and murmured terms of endearment, thirstily, as a flower drinks up rain. I seem to remember her as two distinct people; one, a lovely shimmering creature turning a rapt face of maternal delight to her children for their kisses, and another, a stern preceptor, struggling against the seen and unseen powers of evil.

It is inconceivable to me now that instead of melting me, the tears that she shed over me only hardened my heart. I cannot explain the antagonism aroused in me by her religion, unless it was the extreme vulgarity of the God worshipped in the Ebenezer Sprott Church. My mother's God was not vulgar, I know that now; but she had perforce to take us to church. She was afraid to trust herself with our spiritual upbringing. I am sure if it had not been for all those tumultuous prayer meetings and shouting sermons and voluptuous hymns that I should have understood my mother better. The atmosphere of that church was thick as a fog — it wrapped her from me — I saw her midst those revivalists, distorted, and I set my teeth and was disobedient because I was afraid of them.

Nevertheless, we were affected by her religious spirit. We were confused and stirred up and full of belief in Jesus Christ as our Saviour. How could we help believing? He was more talked about by her, and adored and more explicitly obeyed than any one in the world. Everything we did or did not do was prayed over — that is, everything that had a moral significance — and it seems to me, looking back, that the whole of life, aside from actual play and study, was made up of moral values.

I suppose that's not true. It couldn't have been. We had long summers *en famille* camping in the woods of Canada, cruising up the Atlantic coast, or riding across the western plains of Dakota or Arizona, where our interest was centred on things geographical, geological, or culinary. I can remember my mother making coffee over a camp fire, her skirt pinned up about her waist, her face sunburned and laughing. I can remember her, too, in khaki riding-breeches on a horse, climbing a mountain-side or racing across a field. We seemed to have left our sins and God behind us for the summer holidays, which only proves my contention that the Ebenezer Sprott Church was the real difficulty.

If my mother had lived longer there would no doubt have been trouble over the question of religion, and of all the many rights and wrongs that seemed for her to be bound up in religious truth, such as drinking wine, and smoking, and going to the theatre, and having one's hair curled. I remember once having put my hair up in curl-papers at night. I came shame-facedly to breakfast with what must have been a very curious crown of ringlets; but I was not made to feel that it was ugly and ridiculous; I was made to feel that it was wicked. I came away from her boudoir with a feeling that God was angry with me, and dipped my head into the wash-basin with a distinct sense of expiation. It sounds funny, no doubt, but even nowadays in America little matters of taste are continually being fought out as great moral issues. Had she lived longer, something must have happened either to change her, or to make her unhappy; but as it was, she died, leaving us only half out of childhood, and I remember her most as our delight and

our wonder, as the light in the tower of that fine home of which my father was the foundation.

After dinner as a rule my mother went upstairs and the rest of us into the library. The boys settled down to their books and I played for my father while he smoked his cigar. While I played the piano I thought of him, of the thousands of engines and dynamos he made, and of how little of it all seemed to interest him. I had been down with him often to the works and watched the men pouring molten steel into smooth, hard moulds of sand. The foundry always suggested to me a picture of hell; I felt a kind of horrid delight in the noise and roar of its blazing furnaces. My father seemed not to feel it at all. Once it must have thrilled him, but now he didn't care. He was withdrawing more and more from all activity. I felt, strangely, the inertia that seemed to bear down on him now in that rich still lamp-light.

The library was a long room lined with books, hundreds of books about history, and archæology, and philosophy. Books in German and French, scientific treatises and books on art.

Wide doors opened into the drawing-room and hall, the polished floor was strewn with faded Persian rugs, pictures by Corot, and Rousseau, and Daubigny, and a number of Dutchmen, and some old Italians, covered the wall. On the tables stood lamps, the Tiffany glass shades in rich crimsons, and blues, and golds looking like large luminous flowers.

Jerry and Bud sat by a lamp studying, their books and pads of paper spread on the table. A wood fire was lighted in the fireplace, and the charred logs sent out a faint pungent smell.

Bud always got into trouble. "Hang it!" he would mutter, biting his pencil. "This is the very deuce!"

I would leave the piano with an unsatisfied stirred-up feeling when my father had almost finished his cigar. He often looked up as I came to him, opening his arms, and I clung to him a moment.

"Thank you, Joan darling," he said. I kissed the lines at the corner of his eyes, so stern, and grave, and aloof that the tender words always thrilled me unexpectedly.

"Father, I can't get at it." Bud's hair was rumpled with despair by this time.

"Let me see."

"It's quadratic equations."

My father moved to the light. He sat down with the paper on his knee, the pencil in one hand, his cigar in the other. Bud knelt beside the chair with the algebra book. He began to explain.

I remember standing by the window on a windy winter night. I pressed my face against the window-pane. I could see the wind flying by in the dark. The drive was deserted. Beyond the great circle of light made by an arc light, I could catch the glint of spray dashing up over the wall that bordered the drive. The lake was only fifty yards away. It was very cold, but not cold enough to freeze over. Blocks of ice that one could not see were grinding and floundering about on the water. A solitary carriage passed, its lights moving swiftly. The coachman, wrapped in furs, was bent forward against the wind. I wished there were streams and streams of carriages as there were in New York on Fifth Avenue.

Iroquois had nearly as many fine buildings and beau-

tiful houses, and much more beautiful parks, and its boulevards were empty. What made New York so exciting were the crowds and crowds of beautiful women and prancing horses, and proud coachmen, and wonderful, luxurious hotels teeming with people all having a good time. Here there were so few people of our kind, and such crowds of others. I didn't know whom I meant by "our kind," but the sprawling foreign throngs in the parks on Sundays and the miles of avenue where Jews and Germans had built big stone houses, and the vast desert of the south side where thousands of people lived in little flats, depressed me. My German governess's mother had lived thirty years in Iroquois and didn't speak a word of English. The city didn't really belong to us, to people like my father at all.

The window-pane kept clouding over with my breath. It was snowing, and the wind drove the snow-flakes by through the lamplight in great horizontal streaks. I loved the wind, and the dark, and the waves booming, but it all made me sad.

I stood a long time staring out. Behind me sounded my father's voice: "x equals the square root of," and Bud murmuring eagerly. Presently Fräulein's timid note of summons floated down the hall. Nine o'clock, bedtime. I went up the stairs slowly, sliding my hand along the dark polished rail. Dick was coming down, his face set and gloomy. He had been with my mother, and confessed about the fight with the "Micks." I had an intense consciousness of Dick, of all my brothers. Their lives invaded mine disconcertingly. They teased me and angered me and professed to despise me, and all the same confided in me, and we were all fiercely loyal to each other.

The sight of my mother on the sofa in the boudoir made me realize suddenly that my stocking was sticking to a round skinned place on my knee. My mother was looking very white and her brow was puckered; she had begun the dictation of a letter to Fräulein, whose meek head was bowed over the desk.

"Look," said I, sitting on the edge of the sofa and pulling up the hem of my dress. The stocking wouldn't come down. It was wet and bloody.

"Oh," said mother. "Take care; we'll have to soak it off. Fräulein, the absorbent cotton, please, and the adhesive plaster, boracic acid too, and a bowl of warm water. How did you do it, Joan?" My mother was only mildly interested. The thing happened continually.

"Going over a wall, I came down on my knees on the sidewalk." I kept pulling and wincing — at last I ripped the stocking off, carrying with it a patch of skin and leaving a raw, bleeding place as big as a dollar, which I surveyed proudly. It was rather fun having my mother bandage it, if only the boracic acid didn't sting so. "It's as bad a place as Jerry's, anyhow."

"You weren't in that fight, Joan?" asked my mother.

"No, I watched."

"It won't do, dear, for you to play with those rough boys, and you're getting too big to climb walls."

"Well, I hate playing with girls — all except Louise and Phyllis."

My mother wound the bandage deftly.

"I mean those other boys."

"Oh, the 'Micks.' We don't play with them. We only fight. Patrick O'Brien's ——"

"Yes, Patrick O'Brien. I've told Dick he's to have nothing whatever to do with him even with his fists."

"Why?"

"They're not nice people. His father's a political boss and a brewer; they run most of the saloons on the west side in the Red Light District; terrible places where they entice young girls."

"Ach, so-so," murmured Fräulein. "It is true, I know."

"How do you mean entice them? And what for?" My curiosity was aroused. "What do they do with them — do you mean rob them?"

"No, I don't mean rob them."

My mother's face took on a strange expression. She seemed about to make an announcement. I waited breathlessly. Here was something I didn't understand. Something dreadful and mysterious was in my mother's mind, and I was afraid to learn. Suddenly I blushed, and felt queer and uncomfortable. I didn't know why. Vaguely I was aware of something horrid, somewhere. It made me rather sick, yet the words "Red Light District" were alluring. I fiddled nervously with the bandage and became aware that I was angry with my mother for looking like that — so knowing. Why should she? Why should she?

But she changed her mind; she would preserve a little longer her child's ignorance. She drew me to her, guessing something of the tumult in my heart.

"Never mind how, darling, or what for. There are things you don't understand yet." Her white hand stroked my head affectionately, her voice had a suppressed, and, to me, a suffocating sweetness. It suggested so much — too much of suffering and understanding.

I pulled away. "I don't want to know. Yes, I do.

No, I don't," I said to myself. I stared at my mother inimically. What I could not bear was the feeling that she knew everything, everything that was going on in my own heart. I was afraid that if she smiled at me any more like that, I should blurt it all out, all about Jim Van Orden and my foolish dreams and everything, so I scowled and turned my back, pretending to be fastening my stocking. Why Jim should come into it I didn't know. With my back turned I felt my mother stiffen, and expected the serious tone of her voice when she spoke again.

"And I've told Dick, if you're out with your brothers, he must take care of you."

"He won't like that. Confound it!"

"Joan!"

"Well, he won't, and I can take care of myself."

"It's not safe. Mrs. Chadwick's child has been kidnapped."

"I'd like to see any one kidnap me."

"That is my command, Joan. You're not to go out without Fräulein unless Dick will take the responsibility. Kiss me good-night; and, darling, I want you to tell God about the fight this afternoon."

"Why should I? I don't think He'd care a snap."

"Joan!"

"Well, I don't. It's over now. Besides, whenever I get down on my knees I get so sleepy. I'm sick of praying."

"Joan!"

"Well, I am. Why can't I pray in bed, where it's warm?"

"It says in the Bible, every knee shall bow. Daniel knelt three times a day."

"Oh, I know," petulantly; "but," with a brilliant inspiration, "I can't tonight, anyhow, on this knee." As I turned with a fling toward the door to escape, I caught an expression of intense pain on my mother's face. I stopped with my back to her and heard her draw a long shivering breath. My heart smote me — I did love her. All the same I was terrified at what was coming.

"Joan," her voice was the voice of another woman — small, cold, vibrating — I knew it so well. It always changed like this when she was about to struggle for my soul. It sounded as though she herself had gone into a trance and was possessed of an alien spirit. I felt a dead sickening weight in the middle of me somewhere.

"Joan, kneel down with me now and ask God to forgive you. Let us implore the Holy Spirit to take possession of you more fully."

It was impossible to refuse. I sank on my knees in a tumult of rebellious worship, shame and emotional disgust mingling with fear of the Almighty. I was so excited that I could not utter a word, had I wanted to; but I listened to my mother's voice, that was like a voice of a medium, and I imagined another voice, the voice of God, telling me to drive the devil out of my heart, and I refused. I have never felt so wicked as I felt that evening kneeling beside my mother in her boudoir.

Gradually as she went on praying I grew calmer. I steeled myself against the waves of emotion that flowed from her, and as it seemed from the heart of the unseen. By the time she was finished I was capable of dissimulating. I smiled sweetly, said I was sorry, kissed

her good-night and fled to my room, where I burst into tears.

And I dreamed a terrible dream about the Rev. Ebenezer Sprott coming into the schoolroom and kissing me, with a dirty Bible in his hand open at the story of the woman who was taken in adultery to the Red Light District.

CHAPTER FIVE

THERE was something reckless and knowing about Jim that made me unhappy. Sometimes I felt that he was wicked, and this made him the more fascinating, just as his mother's wickedness that we heard of in our childish world, made her seem the most romantic creature on earth.

It must have been the gossip about Jim's parents that made me pounce upon and fasten on to the word "adultery." I found it in the Bible and learned that people were stoned for it, and looked it up in the dictionary. It was around that word that sin and romance unfolded itself, around a word that for years filled me with the horror of St. Paul.

Because Mrs. Harry Van Orden always seemed to me the most fascinating creature in the world, immorality, which I connected peculiarly with her, began by appearing to my mind at the same time both horrifying and alluring. She was rather Spanish-looking, it seemed to me, tall and dark with a fierce repose and pride, an unnaturally restrained vitality that made her voice hoarse and her movements dramatic. Her face was thin and sallow, with long flashing eyes and white pointed teeth. I used to watch her breathlessly when she passed up the drive, wrapped in furs, slanting her long, narrow figure against the wind; watched her more breathlessly because I had heard Louise's mother say to some one that

Mrs. Harry Van Orden was getting into trouble. No sooner had I heard this than I was consumed with longing to get into trouble like Mrs. Van Orden. What exciting beautiful trouble that would be! Sometimes at the skating rink she smiled at me, her sidelong smile, as she floated across the ice with a certain big man, Mr. Sweney. And gradually I came to connect him with her trouble; also the fact that Mr. Van Orden drank. No wonder, with such mysterious complications in his family, Jim was beyond me in experience.

Then things came to a climax. The word "divorce" slipped about in and out of adult conversation. We were forbidden to go home with Jim to his house any more, and Jim refused to come to ours. All our good times seemed to vanish suddenly. I suppose the break-up of the "Hot Push" wasn't sudden in reality. It must have taken Mr. Van Orden weeks, even months, to work himself up to the divorce. I imagine that we merely grew up in accelerated spasms that took about three months and found ourselves, at the end of that time, self-conscious, and arrayed against one another. I of course didn't understand the attitude of society towards the Van Ordens at the time but looking back it is clear enough.

Drunkenness was a specially marked sin in Iroquois. So militant was the Church against it that among a large section of the population the drinking of wine even in moderation was sinful. The attitude of the smart set toward this subject was self-conscious, just as its attitude toward the larger inclusive subject of religion was self-conscious. Society was definitely irreligious, but it was irreligious with a bad conscience. It entertained on Sunday with an air of bravado, and it was exceedingly

uncomfortable at the mention of God's name. The same with drink. Iroquois society had very definite ideas about drink. It remembered its Puritan ancestors on the one hand and emulated its glittering idols across the Atlantic on the other; and between the two it preserved a rigid countenance towards alcohol. It had wine upon its tables at dinner-parties, but excepting these ornamental events, the very expensive wine-glasses were kept locked in cabinets. Hostesses served wine with more or less *sang-froid*. She who could most successfully make champagne appear to be a matter of course was the most polished society woman of the lot. Mrs. Charlie Bowers was this woman. No one could insinuate that to her, the three different liqueurs passed by her butler after dinner constituted a conscious triumph over the ghost of her grandmother.

Louise's mother was the most worldly woman we had in Iroquois. She could carry off anything. She had a genius for style. Even her features were stylish, and her smart face, that always seemed somehow absolutely *à la mode,* covered completely the mechanism of her principles. Nevertheless, she had principles and a horror of drunkenness, a horror even of drinking when manners did not demand it.

Jim's father drank. He was a living social miracle, not only because of his physical well-being — he was an exceedingly handsome man — but because he had vanquished the puritanism of society. He had created for himself a special dispensation. Because of his inextinguishable charm, Mrs. Charlie Bowers and the rest of society made excuses for him, conjured up a new convention. They invited him to dinner repeatedly, out of the kindness of their hearts, and with each of

these acts of charity, they triumphed afresh in the fact that he never disgraced them, and was always a gentleman as they understood a gentleman in spite of the champagne.

Drunkenness is a sin, but not an unpardonable sin; at least, Harry Van Orden defeated its consequences for a time; but adultery is unpardonable. Mrs. Van Orden achieved no social miracle. She succumbed. She made it impossible for Mrs. Charlie Bowers to be gracious to poor Harry. She had been so inconceivably rash that no one had any doubt at all that she would be divorced, so she had to be dropped and her husband with her for the time being. A man couldn't be invited to dinner without his wife, even an unfaithful wife.

And, of course, the more they forgave him, the less they forgave her. Indeed, all their past forgiveness was piled up against her. Though the knowledge of her offence was new, they were sure the lurid fact was old, and if of long standing, then it was the real cause of his unfortunate habit, and they had been condoning what they thought one of the natural weaknesses of his fascinating temperament, when it really was all the time her fault. They were sure now that they had never liked or trusted her. There had always been something dark and not quite nice about her.

Then arose the question: What would become of the boy, who was the living image of his father? Its maternal instinct made society shiver. Society was, after all, entirely made up of mothers. The arms of these were opened where the faces of the hostesses were blank, and it thus came about that we, Louise included, were still allowed to play with Jim, to have him in our homes, but not to go to his. And Jim for a time, unconscious

and ignorant, for his mother's lips were sealed, frequented houses long since closed to her.

I only saw Jim and his mother together once — at least I only remember this once. It was the night that he and Dick were carried out into the lake on the floating ice, and she came to our house to find him. That was the night, too, that Pat O'Brien turned up as their saviour. A strange night, far-reaching in its result. For one thing, it started off Pat on his career toward the Governorship of the State.

Dick and Jim did not despise Pat. A fist which gives one a bloody nose or black eye, even if it is red and raw and the fist of a "Mick," commands respect. They felt for him a fierce animosity tinged with envy. He was to them a member of a wild foreign tribe, but one who created welcome diversion in the ranks of the civilized, and as such an enemy he was enjoyed ferociously.

They envied him his dirt and his freedom and his huge ugliness, Jim especially, for Jim hated his own personal appearance. Never had any ugly little girl with snub nose and squinting eyes suffered greater humiliation than Jim suffered through the conviction that he was pretty. He was never really pretty, his forehead saved him from that; but his golden hair and deep blue eyes were to him a source of furious resentment. His eyes were certainly of an extraordinary dark blue. They had a deep expression of fierce innocence. They had still, when I last saw him, and his mouth was still the same mouth, and he pulled it down grimly just as he used to do in an effort to spoil its curves.

It is extraordinary how that look in his eyes remained to deny the bitterness of his speech, to stir in one feelings

of pity and fun and tenderness. And in spite of himself, his face in manhood expressed still that absurd babyish sweetness against which his erratic passionate brain had battled with such futile cruelty. He and the devil together would have murdered his innocence long ago if they could — that is how he made me feel at the end.

Sentimental complimenting mothers used to drive him mad. "Women make me sick," he would growl after one had been running her fingers through his hair, and women have always made him sick. He was happiest in the old days when, with cut lip, bulging eye, and battered nose, he felt that his face was as manly and terrible as Pat's. He was small and slight, and he envied Pat the size of his feet, and the bulging muscles of his shoulders, and the nonchalant way in which his strong glistening teeth bit a cigarette. To smoke a cigarette, not in secret, but boldly strolling along the street with one's hands in one's pockets — that was to proclaim oneself a man. Also at close quarters Pat exhaled the odour of beer, and Jim and Dick remarked to each other curtly with bated breath that he probably drank. These things, together with the holes in his stockings, suggested a degree of liberty at home that was dazzling. Probably he never had to go to bed or church. Some fellows had all the fun.

Nevertheless, in spite of their admiring envy, they might have gone on indefinitely calling him a "do'gone Mick," had it not been for that Friday night. On Friday nights we were allowed to invite four of our friends to dinner and have a "rough house" afterwards. A rough house included anything from hide-and-seek to a candy-pull in the kitchen. Dinner was served on

Fridays at half-past six, to leave more time for fun afterwards; but on this particular Friday Dick and Jim had not turned up by seven o'clock. I had invited Louise and Phyllis, of course. Tommy Dodge was there consoling himself with Jerry and Bud. We were all depressed by a feeling of guilt and responsibility. None of us knew where the other two were, but we could think of half a dozen escapades in which we might have been involved, and our lucky immunity didn't console us much.

"We won't wait any longer, John," said my mother at last, moving toward the dining-room. I remember she wore a sort of tea-gown of wine-coloured silk with cascades of black lace at her throat and elbows. There was a strained look on her pale face. We followed gloomily, wondering why we weren't hungry. There was sure to be vanilla ice-cream with chocolate sauce.

Only Phyllis seemed to be enjoying the excitement that depressed the rest of us. Her light fluffy hair was tied by a big frivolous bow, her cheeks were pink, and her eyes dancing, and she whispered, giggling to Tommy.

At that moment the door bell rang. Every one jumped. Edward ran to the door. My mother turned. A woman's clear incisive voice spoke. It was Mrs. Van Orden. She swept up the steps of the vestibule and stood in the hall. I had never seen her in our house before, and her presence seemed strange, her advent dramatic. She was followed by the big man, Mr. Sweney, who stood behind her, silently, during what followed. Under her close fur toque her small sallow face looked proud and mysterious. Her white teeth gleamed as her thin curved lips smiled a short, nervous smile. From

the top of her little high head to the curve of her slender instep, she was foreign, alluring, mysterious. There were skates over her arm. She spoke quickly.

"Please excuse me, Mrs. Fairfax. I knew you were expecting Jim, but something——" she hesitated, "I wanted to make sure. Is he here?"

It was really very curious her being there in our home with that man. He, I remember, was fat, with reddish eyebrows and icicles melting on his short moustache. Not at all romantic, I thought to myself. I must have known a good deal about it all by that time, for I mentally compared him to her husband, to his disadvantage. "How can she be thrilled by that fat man?" I wondered.

My father nodded to Mr. Sweney and moved towards her with his rather formal courtesy.

"No, he's not here," he said.

Her face changed suddenly — quivered and grew still again. "She doesn't look like a mother, but she loves Jim," I thought.

"I was told," her voice was harsh and clear-cut, "that some one saw them, Jim and Dick, going towards the lake with their skates." Her eyes flashed from one to another. Phyllis made a funny little noise — a noise of pleased and wicked excitement. I could have choked her. My mother's face had gone as white as death. The lake was forbidden. Even when apparently frozen solid for miles out, the ice would crack off in great slabs and float away, carrying rash skaters with it. I felt suddenly sick. One of our favourite games had been to go out on the ice as far as we dared. Each one would carry a brick which he would throw ahead of him. If the brick did not go through or show weak-

ness in the ice ahead, we would follow and repeat the experiment. The one who dared go farthest was the hero. Jim had once gone nearly a mile, and I had watched him, trembling with guilty admiration. But none of us had ever gone skating, partly because this had been very expressly forbidden, partly because the ice was really smoother at the skating club. I had a terrible picture of Jim and Dick carried out on a slab of ice along the dark vast surface of the lake, through the night wind. And at the same time that I felt sick with fear, I felt too a certain exultation. How romantic and exciting it all was! And yet in another corner of my brain I knew that I was as bad as Phyllis, whose thrills were rippling to the surface.

Then the door bell rang again, and Mrs. Van Orden flung herself upon the door, but it was a strange boy — he came in blinking, shuffling his huge boots together, his bright red curls standing out grotesquely about his scowling face. It was Patrick O'Brien.

"They're out on the ice," he growled. "It's cracked. They're floating." His angry eyes fixed on my father. "Better come with me and bring me a lantern, and a rope, and a board. Ain't much time. Better git a move on." He kept rolling his torn cap round in his bare hands, that were cracked and bleeding with cold. There was something rough and funny about him that inspired confidence, as he stood waiting, his back to Mrs. Van Orden's rigid figure.

"Better git a move on," he muttered again. His bright speckled eyes shifted from one to another until they rested on Phyllis, then his red face turned a shade redder. Violently he cleared his throat and was about to spit, but there was no place fit to spit in. He looked

about him with growing animosity. Rage and contempt seemed to grow in his face. He looked at his boots from which the snow was melting into little puddles. "Damn!" he half whispered to himself, with a fierce, shamed glance towards the dainty white figure of fluff and ribbon.

It seemed an age before my father in fur coat and cap, and Edward with lantern and rope, were ready, but it had not been more than four minutes.

"Come on, then." Pat jerked his elbow and shot out into the cold. The others followed. Mrs. Van Orden gave Mr. Sweney behind her one glance, he nodded and followed the others. The door banged. I rushed to the window and flattened my face against it. The lake was shrouded in darkness. With a shiver I turned from the window and ran to my mother and knelt on the floor beside her, clutching her hand. Bud was hanging over her fondling her hair. Louise and Phyllis sat at her feet looking up into her white face. At the other side of the fireplace Mrs. Van Orden was seated now, leaning back, her long, slender legs crossed, one slim foot swinging nervously, while, through lowered eyelids, she surveyed the group. Little spasms of pain and annoyance passed over her face. Her eyes gleamed strangely. A cruel little smile parted her lips. Suddenly she leaned forward and burst into violent tears.

"You have so many," she gasped, "and so much besides; God, and a mind at peace."

We stared petrified. My mother got up. "Go into the dining-room. Dinner is waiting. It may be a long time before they come back. Joan, take my place at the table." We crept away and sat round the table miserably in silence for a long time.

"Mother doesn't bow to her," announced Louise at last, tossing her head. How I hated Louise at that moment.

My mind dwelt inquisitively upon the two women in the hall. I never knew what happened. Perhaps in spite of everything, they prayed together for the safety of their sons. Mrs. Van Orden's personality, so dark and so magnetic, is always tinged for me with the fear of that ghastly evening, and never shall I forget the way in which she met Jim on his return, the terrible intensity of her extreme control.

She didn't even touch him, though her arms twitched. They had started out from her sides against her will; she checked them. But he came to her and took hold of her hand that hung rigid by her side, and they stood together close for a moment, both frowning with the effort to deny the emotional and the unusual that was so instinctive to them. I suppose she must have known then that she was going to leave him. It was not long after this that she bolted with the fat man.

We afterwards took it as a matter of course that the boys were saved. It was not in the nature of things that they should be frozen to death or drowned in the icy depths of the lake. Such things happened in Iroquois, but not among people that one knew. Nevertheless, if it had not been for Patrick O'Brien, the snobbishness of fate might have been less obvious.

Pat was a hero, and of a sudden all the fierce animosity that had been levelled against him was turned into friendship. With dogged persistence Jim and Dick insisted on receiving him into their homes. He had disappeared that eventful night, waiting for no word of thanks or farewell, but they met him the following

Monday after school. He was slouching along as always, kicking the snow with the clumsy toes of his boots, and chewing gum violently. They stopped. He grunted. Embarrassed, yet determined to be friends, Jim and Dick ranged alongside. Dumbly they proceeded down the street until they came opposite the German bakery. Pies and "Kafe Kuchen" and gingerbread were displayed in the window, and Kranz's round, rosy face smiled at them through the frosted glass.

"Come on in," said Dick. Pat lurched in and accepted a lemon pie. Solemnly they proceeded, eating, down Grant Street.

"My new dynamo's a peach," murmured Jim.

"Gosh!" replied Pat irrelevantly, but somehow he found himself within Jim's front door. Mrs. Van Orden was standing ready to go out.

"How do you do, Pat?" She smiled and passed out, while he pulled his hat from his head in a tumult.

And once on a Friday night he came to dinner with Dick in a clean collar. He said not a word throughout the meal, but shot terribly shy and angry glances at the girls. And his great hulking roughness made us all suffer with the sense of his discomfort. After dinner, with a last savage frown at Phyllis, he grabbed up his cap.

"I'm goin'— naw — it's no good. I hate girls and all this fancy stuff," he growled to Dick at the door, and bolted.

In vain did they look for him after that. He was not to be found. At last another "Mick" informed them, "No, Pat didn't come to school no more."

Not for years, when we had almost forgotten him, did we find out. Dick found himself face to face with

him on the baseball field. He was captain of the Columbia team. I believe Phyllis must have told me that he rushed home that very night to his father's room behind the big saloon on Grant Street and demanded that he be allowed to go to college, and, undoubtedly romantic as it may seem, those two glimpses of Phyllis in white and blue ribbons were his incentive.

But I started out to tell you how, when Jim found we weren't allowed to come to his house any more, he refused to come to us, and after this, how Dick made such a scene that he was packed off to boarding school, but, as I say, I forget how long it all took. I only know that Tommy Dodge went too, and then the "Hot Push" vanished.

CHAPTER SIX

THE affair of Phyllis Day and Patrick O'Brien would make a romantic story. His career began when she laughed at him with those blue bows bobbing in her hair. His remarkable efforts to educate himself and make money were all because of his desire to possess her. Any one in Iroquois can tell you all about that. He was noisy about it himself. He wasn't the kind of man to hide his furious hunger. His were direct methods. As a "Mick" he gave innumerable embryo gentlemen black eyes; and as a man he lunged into any soft-spoken rivals who happened to want her for themselves. He battered them about, not perhaps with his fists, but in a way that left them equally sore. It is all romantic, if you look at the mere changes and happenings. Compare his home in Grant Street over the saloon with the Venetian house on the drive that he has built for her. The carvings on its stone front are copied straight from the Doge's palace. What more could any one want? However, no one is very much surprised. It's just the sort of thing that happens to people in America. Everybody knows America is a hot-bed for romantic marriages. Marriage is the one gallant adventure of all well-brought-up young people. Marriage for love is not only the dream of youth, it is the achievement of youth, and the divorce laws are all of a piece with it; but the unusual thing

about Phil's affair was that she stood out for so much money. That spoils it rather. I'm afraid the romance was all on one side. Sally Comstock was more typical. She was proud of marrying a poor man and doing her own cooking. Phil consented when her admirer could show her a million dollars, not a penny less. And the curious thing about Pat is, that he has gone just exactly as far as he wanted, and now refuses to go any farther. He is the Governor of the State, and is going to retire from politics when that's over. He has made a fortune and bought her the string of pearls that she saw in Paris on their honeymoon, and he doesn't propose to work himself to death any more. He's going to build a house in California and take to farming or growing grape-fruit or something, and Phil has got to go with him. She has no say in the matter. One would perhaps pity her if she weren't so everlastingly adaptable. I fancy in another couple of years she will be a contented farmer's wife, a domesticated amazon.

I had never managed to make up my mind about Phyllis until that night at Saracens. She had always hoodwinked me, and she does it again now that I am made charitable by the calamities of the war. She looked to me in that clairvoyant moment a devil; but now I begin to feel that she may be innocent of any real knowledge of herself. It may be that her cruelty is no more real than her affection. Her movements and her voice are delicious and comic. Her beauty is full of humour. And I find it impossible now to believe in a humorous she-devil. I prefer to believe that she is just organically wrong somewhere, and that she doesn't know. She is frigid, and I suppose she can't help it. And being frigid she must find all the rest of us very curious, very comic.

That may be the explanation of her laughter and the tricks she plays with us.

She has always played tricks with me. She has always got everything out of me that she wanted. Even when she wanted Binky, I'd have given him to her. It wasn't my fault that Uncle Archie died at the wrong moment. I believe she and Binky would have suited each other admirably, for I realize now that they both have repeatedly hurt me the same way.

I remember one night when I was about fourteen hearing that Phil's mother was ill, and her father away, and the cook drunk. I don't know how I gathered this information, from the servants I suppose, but anyhow I flung on a coat and rushed round to their house in Oak Street and ran up the stairs, and burst out that I had come for the night, that I would take care of the children, that I was so dreadfully sorry. I was full of enthusiastic sympathy, and began all this the moment she opened the front door, and I poured it all out and ended up by saying with an earnest motherly manner: "So, Philly dear, I couldn't bear to have you here alone — brooding through the night; and I came." It sounds ridiculous; of course I admit that it must have sounded ridiculous, but I can feel again the hot wave of mortification and disappointment and the consciousness of my absurdity when she began to laugh. I saw then that she had a paper-covered novel in her hand with her forefinger keeping the place.

"Come on in," she gurgled. "Gracious goodness! come on in. Oh dear, you are so funny," and she led me giggling up the stairs to her room, where she'd been evidently lying on her bed with a box of chocolates. The next day she repeated my remarks to Louise.

"Brooding through the night, great Scott! Would any one else ever talk like that but Johnny!" I remember I felt it very cruel of her to tell Louise how silly I'd been.

Of course I don't mean to say that Binky is quite like that, or has ever so obviously made fun of my feelings about him, but I know that I often used to seem to him absurd and quaint, and I have had to learn not to be spontaneous.

Binky has an aversion to the human heart. He has always regarded my interest in human beings as a not quite nice eccentricity. He has a chronic fear of what I call the great things and the deep things. His bogey is revolution, and his effort is to keep every one well-behaved in his own little place, so he wants always to deny the existence of emotions and mysteries. And as Phyllis doesn't realize that they do exist, they ought to have got on admirably.

I suppose Phil's mother knocked all such romantic nonsense out of her head ages ago, before Patrick O'Brien ever turned up on those flirtatious front steps of the house in Oak Street, those sociable flirtatious front steps where Phyllis received her beaux. How I used to envy her both, steps and beaux. If you are not American you can scarcely realize their significance, their important place in the social system. The Pat-Phyllis story might be labelled "The Romance of the Front Steps." I'm sure Pat proposed on them. They were of wood, and they formed before the front door a small verandah, and in the warm spring evenings they used to be black with young men who came, sometimes with banjos or with offerings of candy, to sit at Phyllis's little white feet. I don't know how old she was when she began to hold court there,

about fourteen, I should think, but it seemed to me she always had had the little airs and grace of a young lady tucked away behind her boyishness, ready to put on when she liked.

Oak Street runs east from Jefferson Drive into Grant Street. The "Micks," many of them, lived in Grant Street above bakeries, groceries, and saloons. Patrick O'Brien lived there somewhere, possibly behind that big saloon on the corner of Maple and Grant. At least I've an idea that was the place, because I know big political gatherings took place there, and you remember Pat's father was a politician.

Oak Street is a sudden unashamed transition between the mansions of Jefferson Drive and the saloons of Grant Street. It degenerates rapidly, for it is not more than five hundred yards from one end to the other, and at the west end, or top, are dilapidated wooden houses built like farm-houses, and tenanted, the stoops as well as the houses, by prolific Italians whose bow-legged offspring sprawl over the wooden sidewalks.

Phyllis lived half-way up Oak Street in No. 83. No. 83 was a mere scrap of a house sandwiched in between two larger ones, but it was nice and cosy, even outside, with its low, inviting front door and the bay window on the first floor jutting out over it. I had always particularly liked Phyllis's house. It was diminutive, like a doll's house, and it had an informal attractive air about it, and Mrs. Day, however sour she may have felt, looked nice and motherly as she sat continually sewing behind the crisp white muslin curtains of the bow window. The smallness and the closeness of the house and of the Days' family life appealed to me. One felt protected and gossipy there. Within the definite

limitations of their poverty was left no room for troubling ideals. I used often to go home with Phyllis in the afternoon, and we invariably found Mrs. Day sewing or darning stockings in the failing light. She would look up when Phyllis burst in, radiant and rosy, and would smile dotingly and bitterly upon her daughter; a smile that pulled her rather pretty mouth to one side. There was a queer mixture of tender indulgence and of hungry curiosity in her glance. Chained so much of the time to her work-table, her horizon bounded by the window through which her fine sharp eyes watched enviously the comings and goings of her neighbours, she would dwell upon her grievances and her ambitions. She depended on Phyllis to bring her news, and for lack of other companions she had become accustomed to treating her in the relaxed mood of evening to all the bitter thoughts that accumulated during the day. Poverty had drawn the two together in a strange adult intimacy.

For me, she had always a sugary, rather pitying smile. It has taken me a long time to fathom that smile, but I have discovered that it was meant to make me feel what a terrible misfortune was mine in being the daughter of such a rich man. I must have been a constant source of acute annoyance to Mrs. Day. She must have enjoyed talking to me as one enjoys scratching a sore. In any case she always detained me, and talked on at me, making continually shy little remarks about rich women having time to be religious, but she had to stick to darning; or about how little girls who didn't have to count their pennies could afford to lose hair-ribbons; always with the same acid-sweet hypocritical pity.

I think I always instinctively disliked Mrs. Day, but I didn't admit this to myself. It would not have been loyal to Phyllis.

What struck me as so curious about that time was that Mrs. Day and Phyllis could be so sweet and loving to each other, and so horrid to the rest of the world.

Phyllis would give her half a dozen nibbling kisses, rubbing her mother's worn cheek with her cold nose, as a puppy would do, and then fling herself on the window-seat among the stockings and under-flannels and children's clothes; and they would gossip about their neighbours in the bitterest way.

I suppose I drank in a certain amount of poison during these sittings — I don't know, I wasn't there so very much after all, but I'm sure Mrs. Day deposited a thick layer of poisonous sediment in her daughter's mind. She must have. Her talk ranged from Mr. Brown's new overcoat next door and the Manniere girls' silk petticoats which they could not afford, to Mrs. Bowers' champagne suppers, which she had never been to, but where the men got drunk, and so forth and so on, all tinged with envy, malice, and maternal jealousy.

"Louise Bowers is going to Paris next year," Phyllis announced one night.

"Oh!" Mrs. Day drew a sharp breath. Her thin face contracted. She moved her head irritably. Phyllis rubbed her nose against the window-pane, purring.

"She's going into a convent. Wouldn't that jar you?" She sniffed, genuinely disgusted with the idea, vaguely and uncomfortably aware of the sudden tumult of jealousy in her mother's bosom.

"If your father could only make a little more money," said Mrs. Day, with a sidelong look at me.

Phyllis opened her eyes. "I wouldn't go to a convent for worlds. Not much!"

Mrs. Day was staring into the gathering gloom, her hands in her lap, her shoulders hanging forward wearily.

"Mrs. Bowers knows what she's doing — oh — if — if ——" She broke off as suddenly as she began, then began again: "Who would ever think my family was better than hers? Family doesn't count in this country, or blue blood — she wasn't any one, you know, but look how she's managed, always entertaining the right people. She's clever, but if your father could only make a little more money ——" Her voice shook.

"Money!" grunted the daughter. "Louise has a rotten time, and Joan doesn't have any more fun than me, do you, Joan?"

I shook my head. Mrs. Day pursed her lips superciliously, and I dimly realized that she felt a deep unreasoning grudge against my mother for being a recluse. It was a crime to have social position and beauty and wealth and then not to do any entertaining.

I began to feel very uncomfortable.

"Your mother," Phyllis indicated me, "asked me yesterday if I believed in Jesus Christ." She giggled. Her mother's twisted smile grew more bitter. Her contempt for the religion that would not let one enjoy life was deep; and she was angry at any one interfering with her own child.

"Your mother is too much of a saint for this world," she said to me.

I got up, feeling hot and angry. My eyes smarted, my lip trembled.

"I must be going home," I managed to say. Mrs. Day looked conscience-smitten, and ashamed, but I was too much afraid of bursting out into tears or angry words to stay. I ran out of the room.

Why did I keep going back there to that detestable talk, with its sly hits at my mother and father? I don't know. I suppose because I loved Phyllis, and I believed she loved me. I still believe she did a little in those days. Why did I love her? I don't know. She fascinated me, as she has fascinated hundreds of other people, in spite of the fact that I knew she would never hesitate to push me out of the way, if I weren't useful to her. I kept going back, and have always kept going back, till this last time when over Binky it all went to pieces, our supposed friendship; and that was due to her after all, not to me.

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Day was a cynic. Phyllis, her daughter, is a cynic if you like, but her mother was an idealist, and a romanticist.

She was a soured, disagreeable woman, with an infinite capacity for being nasty to her neighbours, but she would never be soured and cynical about her family. She might loathe poverty, and be consumed with anger against her husband's futility; she might lose her temper daily with nervous unreason, and weep sickly over the children's garments that filled her work-table: nevertheless, the word "home" would always hold for her a sentimental, even a mystic, significance; marriage would always, in her fancy, assume a religious beauty; motherhood would always seem a heart-breaking delight, and the crown of womanhood. She adored her children; her face would

soften as she looked at her unquestionably pretty daughter, and then a tremor would pass over her features.

"Don't ever let yourself fall in love with a poor man," she would say fiercely to Phyllis, and in these words were packed all the deep affection and resentment she bore her husband. She would never bid Phyllis make a cold-blooded, mercenary marriage, but she would pray in her heart that the child find and love a good, handsome millionaire. It was impossible for her ever to entirely rid herself of the sweetness of her own youth. Her husband was too devoted and too simple to allow of her doing this.

Mr. Day reached home at ten minutes to seven o'clock, just twelve hours after his departure in the morning. He rose every morning at six, had a hot breakfast, took a trolley car for fifteen minutes, a suburban train for an hour, and arrived in the office of the Fairfax works, Fairfax-Ville, at eight-thirty; stayed there till five-thirty, and took the same route home. He had been doing this for fifteen years; and he was forty-five years old. It would have been possible, of course, for him to have shortened his working day by living nearer his place of business. He could have lived on the south side, close to it. The south side was a wilderness, a vast desert, of new pale brick buildings, full of innumerable flats, designed for just such people as himself. Naturally his wife did not wish to live there, and Mr. Day, who lived for his wife and children, agreed that the north side was nicer. People who lived on the north side at least had neighbours, and sometimes one came to know one's neighbours. The children would grow up to know other children of their own kind. This was all

that could be definitely said for it, but the quality of the north side was as absolute and binding as it was indefinable, and Mr. Day admitted it. He always admitted the truth of his wife's convictions, and the value of her tastes, because he felt constantly that he had done her an injury and had been repeating it daily for fifteen years, in not being worth more to John J. Fairfax than two thousand a year.

They had begun life together full of hope. It was a love match, of course, and he had been the envied of all young men when he had secured the penniless belle of that gentle southern town. His prospects had been as rosy as prospects are in "love's young dream." John J. Fairfax, senior, had been a friend of his father's, and had given him a job. He had every opportunity to get on, and he had risen from five hundred a year to two thousand. That was his measure. Maude, the girl-wife, had thought it fun to begin on five hundred dollars a year. She had thought it fun because she had believed it was merely a picnic, a lark of poverty preceding a serious banquet of wealth. Her sweetness had been the good-nature of blind optimism, and with disillusionment had come bitterness. He had in the early days found the sight of her dainty figure bending over the kitchen stove a poetic, entrancing sight, but now it hurt him to notice that her finger-tips were rough with the prickings of a needle. He tried not to see them. He always tried not to see things that hurt him, and always he pretended to be happy, but life weighed on him, and his daily journey home was a long, heavy dream of lost hopes. Only at the last lap of his daily pilgrimage, at the top of Oak Street, did he assume a jaunty air, and on reaching his own front door he would begin to whistle,

keeping it up while mounting, more rapidly than he found comfortable, the last steps to the bedroom. It was his nightly terror that she should tell him the cook had left, but he came to her smiling, and his large, rubicund face, made for jollity, never gave him away. He looked still, at a casual glance, a hale and hearty man, but his high colour was not the colour of health, his figure, seemingly robust and portly, was flabby and top-heavy and his knees weak. His innocent, delightful blue eyes were, too, marred by blood-shot eyeballs, and there was an uneasy apologetic joviality in his manner. His natural kind-heartedness had gradually through repeated snubs from business men, turned into a sort of conciliatory cordiality. He knew himself to be a failure, and he now pretended to love a world that had conquered him.

Whether Mrs. Day persuaded him to go to my father or not about Phyllis I don't know, but I think not. I think Mr. Day was too proud to beg, and too fine to set so much store by a fashionable boarding school for his daughter. He was a simple man, and he worked proudly, plodding stolidly to his death. I've an idea that my father sent Phyllis to school without it being suggested to him, and with Mr. Day's reluctant permission and Mrs. Day's resentful gratitude. Anyhow, I know it had all been arranged when I went to say good-bye to Phil that night before we went abroad. She was going to Farmington in the autumn, and it was only her father's collapse that prevented her making a lot of fashionable friends and realizing her mother's dream, for Patrick O'Brien could never be said to realize Mrs. Day's dream. Rich and powerful as he is to-day, she can never forget that he was once a "Mick."

Softening of the brain is a terrible thing. It lasts so long. Poor Mrs. Day! Doubtless during those years of nursing, of weeping over that living corpse, so ghastly in its similarity to her husband, during those years of endless tenderness and patience, with which she tried to atone for her many bygone tempers, it must have come to her that she was responsible. Yes, it must have been quite clear to her that it was her own jealous ambition that killed him. And doubtless, too, the terrible position at home had a lot to do with Phyllis's acceptance of Pat. She has been able to make her mother very comfortable since her marriage.

The windows and doors of many houses in Oak Street stood open, that evening, when I went to say good-bye to Phyllis. They sent out shafts of light into the shadowy street, that was alive with laughing voices and moving forms. Children played hop-scotch on the sidewalk. Mothers and fathers and neighbours visited on their front steps.

I found Phyllis in the kitchen washing up the dinner dishes. She had a big blue check apron over her white muslin dress, and her arms were submerged in the steaming water of the sink. Her wonderful hair was tied up at the back of her neck with a white ribbon, in a way that made her look a young lady. It was terribly hot in the kitchen, and the flickering bracket light seemed gasping for breath in the close, steamy atmosphere.

She nodded brightly over her shoulder without explanations. Quite obviously, the cook had left, and she had cooked the dinner, had put it on the dumb waiter, served it to her father and mother and the two younger children in the dining-room, and then had cleared it away. She was continually doing this. One of the

points on which she was immovable was that her mother should not enter the kitchen in the evening. She was very considerate of her mother, and very efficient. The dinners she cooked were good. I know because I've eaten them, and I've watched her make pastry, baste a roast, mash potatoes, with the swift, accurate movements of a professional. All the same she hated cooking. She didn't grumble, because there was no use grumbling, she merely laughed; but she hated it. It might have been over that stove that she made up her mind not to accept any man with less than a million dollars. She had no nonsense about her, no sentiment of self-sacrifice that made her enjoy work. Hers is an economical nature, given to no extravagance of mood, and she is in her frivolous way a stoic with a philosophy of life almost as finished as Binky's.

I implored her to let me help her, and rolled up my sleeves.

"All right," she said, "you dry." She began hauling plates out of the water. One by one, she handed them to me. Through the open windows came the sound of a hand-organ and children screaming happily. And she looked so exquisite in that dingy kitchen that for tuppence I could have sentimentalized over her.

"You're a dear," she began. "Poor Daddy, he couldn't have managed it. I'm going to have the most scrumptious new clothes, and two silk petticoats. I suppose all the girls at Farmington have silk petticoats." I murmured that I supposed they did. "I wouldn't change with Louise, and go to her convent for worlds. Tommy, you know, will be at Yale. He's asked me to the Yale-Harvard game." She chattered on, laughing with anticipation, and rinsing plates busily. If I have not succeeded

in conveying to you her attraction, let me put it simply, that it lay in the fact that she always looked so happy. Her dimples and her very white, regular teeth, and her eyes and her hair, all seemed alive with happiness, and she is just as invaluable to society as light. One would as soon think of resisting her as of pulling down the blinds on a sunny day in the middle of winter. And the fact that her brightness is a fake doesn't matter. What difference does it make whether it's only a trick of eyelash and curved lips, or an effulgence from the soul? None. The result is the same, precisely the same.

"There! I've just got to put these away, then I'm done; you go up and talk to mother till I come. Gosh! it's hot." She dismissed me with a splashy gesture.

I found Mr. Day in the hall dozing over his evening paper, his large head fallen forward on his chest in a way that made him look decrepit and old. Mrs. Day was on the front stoop in a low wicker chair, fanning herself with a palm-leaf fan. She proceeded to smother me with pity.

Was I not going to boarding-school at all? Wouldn't I miss my girl friends? It was so unnatural for a young girl to spend all her youth with an old man, not that my father was really old. She supposed, thanks to me, that Phyllis would make lots of nice friends in the East. From her pale lips and expressive eyes I gathered that Phyllis was infinitely lucky and beautiful, that it was nice of my father to help her, but that she could have got on very well without any help at all.

I suppose I was jealous of Phyllis. Having played the benefactor it seemed to me a sorry rôle, and going abroad with my father began to look very dull compared

to Yale-Harvard football games. I felt very miserable by the time she came out to join us, all fluffy muslin and curls.

I was going away for a long time, and the sociability of Oak Street and the informality of the front stoop appealed to me more than ever before. Phyllis, sitting on the top step, rubbed her cheek against her mother's knee. Her eyes were bright, a little smile played about her lips. The provoking dimples came and went in her firm, slender cheeks. I felt lonely, and when two young men arrived I was suddenly set aching with increased jealousy. No young men ever came to call on me in the evenings. Why not? I tried to picture them "joshing me," as the phrase was, on Jefferson Drive, but I couldn't. I sank into mute admiration of Phyllis. It was wonderful the way she entertained them and eyed them and laughed softly with alluring movements, and seemed to keep them amused without talking. Mrs. Day had disappeared, and presently another young man emerged out of the shadowy street, and then two more, to all of whom she threw a casual hallo, as they joined the group. The front steps were presently crowded with young men, who sat at Phyllis Day's little slippered feet and vied between them to make her laugh. It seemed that every evening young men paid court in this fashion to Phyllis. They ragged her about each other, and teased her mysteriously. And she was demure and secretive.

"Who came every night last week, I'd like to know?" sneered one jovially.

"He's got it bad."

"Say, Phil, look here, you must leave the débutantes' beaux alone; they'll be getting jealous." And so on,

to all of which Phyllis gurgled and replied in dainty negative monosyllables, repudiating carelessly the accusation of being a belle and cutting out the older girls.

I tried to talk to the youths, but I didn't succeed very well. They spoke to me stiffly, and looked bored when I asked them if they were fond of baseball. My heart grew heavier and heavier. Why couldn't I sparkle and fascinate like Phyllis? Why couldn't I talk silly, delicious nonsense?

My father's appearance came as a blessed release. He stood at the bottom of the steps surveying the group. He seemed astonished. They all sprang to their feet. Phyllis said, "Good-evening, Mr. Fairfax," with the manner of a society lady that suddenly made her absurd. Then she called through the door: "Mamma, Mr. Fairfax has come for Joan." There was an awkward moment during which we all stood around.

My father talked a little to Mr. Day, who followed his wife outdoors, then said good-bye. Phyllis ran after me, shaking off her young men, to whisper enthusiastic endearments into my ears, and then flew back to them in a whirl of smiles and dimples, and I walked home heavy-hearted with my hand on my father's arm, wondering how I could make myself fascinating to men.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I HAVE alluded to my mother's death, but I must go back and bring you up-to-date with Louise. My mother died the year after Jim Van Orden's mother was divorced, and as Mrs. Bowers must have made up her mind then and there to have Jim for a son-in-law, it seems worth while to tell you a little more about her. Doubtless you think Louise an uninteresting person; perhaps she is, as a character, but not as a social product, as the sort of thing America with its American mothers turns out; for whatever she is, her mother made her. She was never allowed to find out anything for herself, or follow out an idea of her own. Mrs. Bowers nipped her soul in the bud, and went on nipping and snipping at her mind until there was absolutely nothing left. And Louise never knew it. Not only did she not know that she had no mind, nothing but a collection of attitudes handed to her beautifully catalogued by her mother, but she was totally unaware that she ever had a soul, that her mother ever crushed it and committed skilful murder upon it with a pair of nippers. Mrs. Charlie Bowers is very clever with nippers. She, at least, is an interesting person if her daughter is not. In her worship of virtue she expressed the mind of society. Society in Iroquois can be known by its clothes. Mrs. Bowers was one of the best-dressed women in town, she was a leader of society. She expressed, in her conduct and her conversation, the beliefs and ideals

of the most fortunate people of her local world, and virtue is worshipped by the very best people in Iroquois, that is, by the best-dressed people. It almost seems as though virtue is worshipped because through virtue one most easily obtains clothes and more clothes, and the background for clothes — but perhaps that is not quite true.

Those things which Mrs. Bowers worshipped were the idols of the refined and the wealthy, or, to be more exact, of the cultured, who were also rich, for refinement without wealth was not worth her while, and wealth without culture was to her distasteful.

Still, as has already been said, it was neither culture nor riches that was enshrined in the temple of her perfectly irreligious mind, but the love of virtue. There it lay in her heart under the frail, frivolous laces of her Parisian clothes, like some bit of antique jewellery embedded in a modern casket, out of place, yet ineffaceable. It was the very centre of her being absolute in itself, linked to no religious experience, nor any ideal fervour, yet reconciling to itself her most worldly ambitions. There is a certain logic in the matter.

Social position in Iroquois is rigid and tyrannical in its demands. Society, that small nucleus of snobs, which has evolved itself somehow out of the prairie, Society has to justify its existence constantly, to give evidence of its actuality daily. Without traditions, or titles, or world-old names, without landed estates, or hereditary noses, or state decorations, without any of that stability of a group revolving about and deriving its life from a royal palace, it is obliged to fall back upon clothes for its insignia. Social position is too

illusive a thing to allow either of dowdiness or moral laxity. No counterpart of an untidy and comfortable dowager duchess with bad table-manners and antique bonnets exists in Iroquois. Even old Madame Bowers, aged seventy, mistress of a family of three generations of millionaires, was obliged, by her strenuous daughters-in-law, to have her white hair dressed daily by a French maid. No beautiful and fatally fascinating creature, with an inevitable succession of lovers, would have been tolerated for one moment. Mrs. Harry Van Orden was our nearest approach to the type, and Mrs. Harry Van Orden was a tragic figure. To no set, however smart, however eager to copy the ways and manners of that far-distant, glittering English vanity fair, was morality anything but a consideration of supreme importance.

Mrs. Van Orden was divorced by her husband during the first winter that Jim was away at school, when Louise and I were fourteen. Mrs. Bowers and the rest of society were delighted to be justified in their long succession of snubs and insults. Harry Van Orden's good-nature had occasionally given them a feeling of insecurity. If they had not felt sure that in the end he would really divorce her, they would not have pursued the same tactics, but they had been right, and their high moral attitude brought its reward. Agatha — they spoke of her as "poor Agatha" — had disappeared at the beginning of the proceedings. She had been seen for the last time at the railway-station bidding her son good-bye, with set lips and haggard face. No one had realized then that this was the last time she would see her beautiful boy, but the thrill of the dramatic moment was relished in retrospect. Even the newspapers

appreciated the tableau, and wrote touchingly about the beautiful erring mother's last scene with the child she was to abandon. The Iroquois *Tribune* understood the temperament of a society that was made up of mothers. It was disappointing, from a journalistic point of view, that the case was not defended; the proceedings in court were nil, but the most was made of every scrap of domestic information. A column appeared on the front page every day for a week, then paragraphs. The *Tribune* limited itself to detailed descriptions of episodes and a biography of the co-respondent, and speculation as to his income, but the yellow journals had excellent photographs of the incriminating housemaid and of the country hotel where the lovers were wont to retire, also an architect's plan of Mrs. Van Orden's bedroom and boudoir.

Mrs. Bowers and her friends thought the publicity of the affair absolutely disgusting, and evidenced by their horrified conversation a masterly grasp of the entire case in every detail. Mrs. Bowers happened to be giving a luncheon on the day that the decree was given. It was a feminine lunch, of course; luncheons always are in Iroquois; the guests were feminine, the food was feminine, and the conversation was feminine. Of the three, undoubtedly, the food, if analysed, would have done most towards the establishment of the female as superior to the male species. It was marvellous, ten courses of it, and not too much for a neurotic stomach. Each dish was a work of art, and was without body or substance or any of the normal masculine attributes of food, saving that of flavour. That chickens and potatoes and green vegetables and fruit had gone into the concoctions was unbelievable. One's fork dipped into the

chicken *mousse* as through cream, and one's palate registered faint flavours of mushrooms, truffles, olives. For the *pièce de résistance,* the something solid supplied in case some one might be hungry, there were *médaillons de bœuf,* no bigger than silver dollars, trimmed with asparagus tips and tiny livers of some diminutive bird. Salads of alligator pear and lettuce-leaves as crisp and crinkled as though freshly laundered, were perched lightly on rare Sèvres plates, and ices *à la Maraschino* froze languidly in golden goblets. The table, highly polished and without a tablecloth, glittered with cut-glass, silver, and frail painted china, and the women glittered with quick, flashing movements of heads, eyes, teeth, and jewels. In high, piercing voices they provided one another with an intellectual repast no less highly seasoned and meaningless than the food toyed with upon their plates, while two ebony negro butlers, the only male beings in the room, in phenomenally white cravats, carried priceless dishes back and forth from the pantry with discreetly rolling eyes. They were the only negro butlers in Iroquois. Under the tutelage of Mrs. Bowers they had acquired distinction.

"Will he marry her, do you think?"

"I sincerely hope so"—demure, sympathetic, very sympathetic lips and cold eyes.

"But he hasn't a penny!"

"Are you quite sure? Poor Agatha always showed herself quite clever where money was concerned"—sympathy less perfect, more mixed with sourness.

"That's what's so strange. He really hasn't more than five thousand dollars a year—and she, nothing."

"I'm sorry for the man, then—a woman like that to support."

"They'll have to disappear."

"They have — they're in Italy. My nurse told me."

"Really! She does manage to keep things dark. Why, nobody had any idea for months, you know. She must have been carrying on all that winter, when she was the rage — and we had to entertain her to please the men. Positively, George insisted on having her to dinner every month, and at the very time she was sitting at my table, she must have been already ——"

On the other side of the table —

"Not a penny! Think of it, my dear! Leaves her handsome husband and beautiful child to go off with a penniless man, and a fat, ugly man too. I can't understand it!"

"She'll never be able to show her head here again. Poor Agatha!"

"But tell me"— voices lowered, looks grow mysterious —"do you think it's true that Harry Van Orden came on them ——"

"I shouldn't be a bit surprised. She was reckless, wild. You know for yourself she didn't care a bit what people thought. He was there all the time. No wonder Hal got drunk every night!"

"But in her own bedroom, with her boy sleeping on the same floor ——"

"Well, you saw the plan sketched in the paper. Besides, I've been in her bedroom — the bathroom does lead out the other way."

"Isn't it perfectly horrible?"

"Yes, absolutely horrible."

And underneath all the excited talk there ran a note that no one heard, or would have admitted hearing, the note of envy. As their horror did not interfere with their

enjoyment of the scandal, so their pitying superiority did not altogether still the envious curiosity in their own barren breasts. Their interest in this poor tragedy was the more voracious because they were virtuous women — and ignorant. They had reached the average of forty without tasting the flavour of illicit bliss, or even of unconventional emotion. Their marriages had been love-matches. Their husbands had achieved romance in marrying them, and expected their wives to prove the ideal by subsequent years of emotional slavery. And when they showed signs of finding their bondage irksome they were bribed with jewels or sables, or carriages or expensive orgies of dressmaking in Paris. Poor little society women of Iroquois, with your ropes of pearls and your female companionship, you had nothing natural to fall back on but motherhood, and you became mothers with a vengeance — not in the number of children you brought forth, but in the intensity of your mothering — and if your mothering was a silly and greedy and withering thing, who can blame you? You had no other outlet for those animal instincts you concealed so cleverly under your flat stylish bosoms.

We heard a lot of this talk from our post in the pantry; by we, I mean Louise, Phyllis, and I. We had descended on the pantry to "lick the plates," so to speak, and while occupied with this pastime we listened through the open door, hidden by a painted leather screen. The scraps of conversation were nearly as thrilling as the scraps of food were delicious, and we had, together, at precisely the same instant, the same inspiration. We would read all about it in the newspapers. Sam, the negro butler, kept the old newspapers in the pantry cupboard. We found three, and, having finished the

remnant of the biscuit glacé, retired to Louise's room. That was the last time we three ever met in Louise's bedroom until three years ago, when we met to discuss the horrid tangle of ourselves and our husbands. How strange it seems! We all lay in a happy, loving bunch on the bed, behind that newspaper, dated February 9th, 1895. We thrilled and gasped and felt guilty in unison, arms and legs intertwined, flushed faces close together, eyes intent on the same pages, when Mrs. Bowers came in to scatter us. She certainly did scatter us. As I say, we've never met, we three, in a bedroom of any one of us since then until three years ago, when we met and sat stiffly at wide distances, and walked the floor and stared out of the window, our backs to each other.

At the sight of her daughter reading the divorce case, Mrs. Bowers had simply flown into one of those terrible rages that were common enough with her in her own domain, but she used the outburst cleverly after she cooled down. She was, in the first place, really shocked and pained at the idea of her child's finding out about this thing.

Mrs. Bowers regarded God somewhat as she might have regarded a very aged poor relation whose presence in her house would make her ridiculous, but she nevertheless brought up her daughter in the way of righteousness. That her child should be touched by the unclean breath of the wicked world was a frightful thought, but her fear for Louise's innocence was not based on any hope of her entering heaven as a spotless little saint; it partook rather of the art-dealer's concern lest a priceless treasure be reduced in market value. Louise was her darling daughter, the centre of all her ambitions and imaginings, and she would some day be married.

Every hour of every day she was becoming more or less desirable, and that she might be infinitely desirable in order that she might command the highest price in the matrimonial market; to this end was her mother straining every nerve. Not that she was entirely consistent in the matter. She was human after all, and she craved the love of this child of hers, allowing this craving to lead her into indulgences. Phyllis had been one of those indulgences, but now Phyllis was to be barred.

Mrs. Bowers had never met Mrs. Day. There was no occasion for the two to meet, as Mrs. Bowers went only to the smartest functions, and Mrs. Day rarely went to any functions at all. They knew each other quite well by sight, but never had they spoken. It would not have been impossible for Mrs. Bowers to make a friendly call on Mrs. Day had there been any point in this, but she saw no point in it. On the contrary, it would be much easier for Louise to cut Phyllis when the time came, if Louise's mother did not know Phyllis's mother. Mrs. Bowers felt that the time had now come. She anticipated a slight struggle, nothing more. The incident of the newspaper was as good an occasion as any. Phyllis and I were packed off home, and Mrs. Bowers re-entered her daughter's room with a hard, calm face, to find the latter a crumpled heap on the bed, her nose red, her eyes swollen, her breath coming in broken, gusty sobs.

"Lou, darling, who suggested to you to read that paper?" demanded the mother with sinister mildness.

"I don't know. We heard you talking at lunch, and we found it in the pantry cupboard."

Mrs. Bowers did not wince. Her philosophy of life was complete.

"Things that are fit for grown people to read are not fit for children." Still, it sounded like a self-justification, and that was a mistake. "I feel sure," she went on, "that it was Phyllis who suggested it. I don't want you to play with Phyllis any more."

Louise sat up in bed suddenly, her wiry curls standing out about her head in bushy glory.

"Not play with Phyllis?" she gasped.

"Exactly that." Mrs. Bowers shut her lips.

"But — but we go to school together — every day. I can't just stop — and I won't — I won't. I love Phyllis. We're chums — we are a triumphirate."

"A what?"

"We three — Joan and Philly and I." These words came fast and passionate. "We're a triumphirate, a three-cornered friendship forever'en ever — I love Phyllis. We tattoed our arms. It's a sign that'll never fade."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Louise; but as for meeting Phyllis at Miss Broadwood's, you may as well stop school now. We'll go to Paris a few months earlier, and that will make it easier for you."

I know quite well what was said, and how it all happened, partly from what Louise told me, partly from my subsequent understanding of Mrs. Bowers and her maternal methods.

The word Paris acted just as her mother wished on Louise's brain. Oh, clever woman! Louise had been prepared for this long, long before. All unwittingly she had imbibed the doctrine of her mother's ambitions, had drunk down the intoxicating drink of her mother's

carefully-mixed flattery. She was to be a great belle and a great beauty, and Paris was to make her this. She was to have perfect manners and marvellous clothes and all the accomplishments, and she was to acquire these in Paris. She was to fulfil the splendid destiny of a beauty and a belle in making a fastidious choice among all the suitors that would ask for her hand, and in order to be in a position to do this she must go to Paris. Now that word Paris. It flashed across the dark struggle of her loyal little heart, lit up everything garishly, distorted the old tired feelings, made them look uninteresting.

Her heart ached for Phyllis, and her mind, dazzled by Paris, was troubled. She thought moodily, and one finger stole into her red mouth.

"Take your finger out of your mouth." She obeyed, and gazed at her mother with troubled eyes in which was no questioning of authority, no suspicion of criticism, but sheer bewilderment.

"But after Paris?" she asked.

"You'll be there three years. Then we'll travel for a winter — and in four years you'll come out." Another magic phrase —"Come out." What visions of dresses and parties and beaux and flowers and chocolates it called forth!

"But won't Phyllis be coming out too?"

"I don't think so." Mrs. Bowers smiled. "You needn't worry about things so far ahead. I don't mean that you must never speak to her again. When you're eighteen you can do as you like." Mrs. Bowers smiled again, but she could not resist elucidating the matter a little further. "You see, darling, Phyllis is — is a nobody — just now you dear children, Joan and yourself,

don't understand these things, but you will find when you come out that you won't meet Phyllis any more."

"Oh, but Joan?" Louise held her breath. Was I to be banned too?

Mrs. Bowers burst into her very effective, carefully practised laugh. "What a stupid you are, my pet! Joan? But of course you shall always love Joan," and Louise was relieved.

She would have given me up too, of course, if that had been on her mother's program, but I didn't find her out then. I tried not to blame her for obeying her mother in regard to Phyllis. It was not until I said good-bye to her that I, for the first time, was really irritated by her complacency and suspicious of her affection for me.

"Oh, Joan, Joan darling — I can't leave you — I simply can't. Won't you come? Get your mother to let you come to the convent. You simply must. I can't live without you." And suddenly I found myself saying to myself, "I don't believe it." She had been in the habit of professing just as much love for Phil, and it had been easy enough for her to give Phil up. I said as much.

"Oh, but that's different." I didn't see why. "Phyllis and I have never, never been to each other what you and I are." That was a lie, but such a glib little lie that I swallowed it for the moment. "And then you see ——" She paused; her blue eyes took on an obtuse, complacent look, that made me want to shake her. "We can't help it, if fate separates us from Phyllis. If she's going to be so poor, you see, she won't be able to do what we do. It's better to see

that now." I began to burn inside, and I had then an inspiration.

"You're a snob," I burst out. I believe we parted in anger and tears.

Phyllis only laughed when I told her Louise had gone.

"Louise is a goose, but she's getting to be a cat," she said after a minute's thought.

"It's her mother," I ventured.

"Her mother is twenty cats." She sniffed and laughed and tossed her head. "I don't care — I'm going to have a good time. You wait." She was right. It didn't matter to her, but it mattered to me. I had believed in the "triumphirate," and it was gone.

CHAPTER EIGHT

MY mother died when I was fifteen. I suppose, if she had not died when I was fifteen, that I should have turned out a more normal, light-hearted person. I should probably have gone to Farmington with Phyllis, and after some years of idiotic, youthful philandering with life, should have married Jim. Yes, certainly I should have married Jim, and everything would have been different, smaller, quieter, more intimate. The terrible things would have been concealed by a familiar environment crowded with pretty objects. By the terrible things I mean space and time and imminent eternity. By pretty objects I mean houses and yachts and babies, all the things that fill the life of an American woman. American women are given over to "things"— motor-cars and clothes.

It is good for a person to be anchored to one little spot. The protective intimacy of walls; that is what we pigmies all need to keep us from going to pieces; that and some one to be loyal to. Jim and I have both gone to pieces rather. I don't see why we need have. I can only put it down to the fact that in the face of so much time and distance I hadn't the courage of my conviction, the conviction that was with me through my other love-affairs. I wanted him all the time, but it seemed too incredible a thing, too supernatural an instinct to govern one's conduct. Yes, I had a supernatural instinct about him. I remember the peculiar

still feeling that enveloped me suddenly once in the midst of my frenzy over Binky, when I got a letter from him. It was such a deep, still feeling. I ought to have responded to it. I ought to have thrown Binky over then and there, at that moment, when he came into the room smiling that bright, bewildering smile of his. I ought to have had the courage of the faith that was in me, but I hadn't. I had not seen Jim for three years, and his letter wasn't quite a proposal, also his handwriting was stiff, and Binky was there, right there, exerting in his effortless way that meaningless charm of his that dazzled me so. It is strange how one denies reality, irresistibly. There was always in those days the element of fear and strangeness and perverse excitement in my feeling for Binky. I didn't analyse it, but I felt it sufficiently; whereas that still rapture of recognition in the mere thought of the other one was enough to tell me that this was the way to go. I must have realized it all, for I remember feeling quite sick, just as I used to feel as a child when I lied to my mother; I remember feeling just like that when I turned to Binky, crumpling the letter in my hand.

This incident is an example of the thing I am trying so hard to understand and express, in all the writing of these confessions. It represents the fatal facility with which I chose the wrong thing, knowingly and unhappily. It represents the peculiar war going on always in myself, a struggle so inarticulate and so subdued under the padding of habit that I scarcely noticed it, or rather that I found I could quite easily ignore it. My moral condition was something like that of a very sleepy person wakened in the night by the soft muffled sounds of a struggle going on somewhere far away

downstairs. The noise is so slight, and I am so sleepy, that although I know it is a desperate fight between two enemies, I still can quite easily sink back into oblivion by merely shutting my eyes. Such seems to me to be the quality of my spiritual conflict, and my failures or defeats were just as real, but no more vivid to me at the time, than the half-silly recognition of disaster by the dreamer who floats off into sleep with a vague feeling of depression too weak to rouse him. Long afterwards, of course, he wakes up, and in the glaring light views what has happened, and wonders how he could have allowed it to be so.

What interests me is this excessive sleepiness of our spirits. We are all drugged, and the realities of the soul are disguised under wads of padding, until they appear so grotesque and absurd that it becomes madness to take them seriously. This is civilization. My mother was not a civilized person. She was a mystic to whom the things of the spirit appeared as grand and terrible and concrete. She was a mystic to whom the things of the spirit appeared tremendous and urgent, in just the same way as guns and flags and battleships appear tremendous and urgent to Binky. She took God seriously, and she took Him seriously in just the same way as Binky takes a Field-marshal seriously. The will of God was to her as explicit as any military order ever was to a subordinate. Divine truth was a study, no less fascinating, intricate and accurate, than a textbook on artillery is to a gunner. It had the same effect upon the soul as military discipline has upon conduct. It resulted in an entirely reliable specialist, a drilled and disciplined character to whom a mistake was impossible — to whom untidiness of soul was horrible, to whom one lapse from

duty, that is duty to God, was attended by terrific consequences. This is splendid. Its result is the survival of the individual's precious integrity. I know this. It is the one way of standing up against the onslaught of experience. I know because I haven't done it. I have gone to pieces, and I have become one of those who are amused or shocked by spiritual seriousness. We are afraid of intensity, we cringe before it as before an obscene sight, and we call it bad form. Truth is a ridiculous image to Binky or a disquieting ghost. I don't mean that he is a liar.

But I am wandering.

My mother's death gave my father into my hands. I felt, somewhat arrogantly and egotistically perhaps, that he was now my chief responsibility.

I did not accept the fact of death meekly. I fought it. In the terribly personal way that I had of taking all impersonal things, I set all the passion of my youth against death, and in the struggle between my bursting heart and the vast, unruffled infinite, my chidhood vanished. It seemed to me that the sun went out, that the world with all its gaieties and friendships was blotted into darkness; and God too dissolved, with His attendant fancies of a beatific Heaven. You see, it was impossible to go on hating Him as I hated Him for killing my mother. It was easier to kill Him too, so I denied His existence. It seemed the best thing to do.

Imperceptibly and stealthily, death had stolen upon my mother, washing the light from her eyes, and the colour from her hair. So slowly and gently did it come that we, without knowing how it happened, grew accustomed to hear her lying still upstairs on her couch, then again to her greater prostration in her bedroom, propped

among her large white pillows. The life of the house centred for so long a time about her bed that we almost forgot she had not always been thus, lovely and frail as a shell resting upon foam.

And it never occurred to us that she was going to die. Her smile was too bright, her little pretty ways too appealing, her will too strong; and we had a deep instinctive belief in the partiality of fate, or as we had been taught to put it, the loving-kindness of God. Nothing terrible had ever happened to us before. It was beyond the bounds of possibility that anything terrible should happen now. As always we played, romped, shouted (for she would not have our voices silenced), went to school and came home, dragged our dirty boots across her room, flung our school-books at the foot of her bed, and wrangled loudly about where we would all go next summer when she was well.

Doctors came and went under our unseeing eyes. Nurses in uniform took up their abode in our house, and my father's silence deepened. Yet marvellously, we did not know, wrapt securely in the shell of youth, were not oppressed. Sometimes, instead of stiffening into hurt dignity, Fräulein's eyes would fill with tears when we were rough and disrespectful, and she would fling her arms around us with unaccustomed emotion. This disquieted us a little, but we put it down to the vagaries of the German temperament.

Then — it came suddenly in the middle of the night. Out of a terrible, confused dream I saw the white-capped head of a nurse leaning over me.

"Your father has sent for you to come to your mother's room."

Dumb, shivering, I crept out of bed, and met Jerry,

Bud, and Dick on the stairs, bleary-eyed with sleep, stumbling along in their slippers. From behind the closed door of Fräulein's room came the sound of sobbing. A strange, terrible presence seemed to float with us down the stairs. An inexpressible terror held us in its grip as we stole into mother's room.

The light was turned low, and by the bed knelt my father, motionless, his eyes fixed on the worn, lovely head that lay so still. There was a strange smell in the room, a sickening hospital smell. A doctor stood a little away, under the light. The other doctors were beyond the boudoir door, and the presence of these strangers seemed to set the seal upon the horror of it all, seemed to make death actual, hideous, and professional. If she could only be left alone with us — we loved her, we would keep her somehow — we would beat back that thing.

My father didn't seem to notice us standing dumbly at the foot of the bed. A nurse touched him on the shoulder, and he moved ever so little, beckoning us to come nearer. The waxen face on the pillow was turned towards us, but the eyes were closed.

"Dear — the children," said my father's voice. The eyelids flickered. The lips parted. We waited a long, long time. How like a child she had sometimes seemed to us, and now it was as though she were the youngest of us all, just a very little girl. The lips moved again.

"It is so beautiful — you must all come." It was as though a swiftly dipping wing had touched her face with unearthly light; and as I realized that she was already far away, separated for ever from our aching reality, tasting of an ineffable bliss at the moment of our poor agony, I was all at once consumed with hatred

for God. I wanted to throw myself on my knees and scream out. Her strange ecstatic words were so cruel, and He had put them into her mouth. She was going to Him, just as she had said so many times she would go, and He was not even allowing her to want to stay with us. It seemed to me now that this had always been the reason for our unhappiness. God had always been getting between her and us, and now He was doing it again once and for all.

A deeper stillness had settled upon her face. I stood beside my father a long time. So still he was, as still as the figure on the bed. They were both so still, and the invisible cord of sympathy that held them together was loosening. She would escape him utterly, she was escaping now. A terror for him seized me. The minutes seemed to drop into the silence like drops of water, and melt away. They were dropping one by one, all the minutes of her life, and when they had all melted away she would be gone.

The nurse came to take me away, but I slipped into his room instead of going upstairs, and knelt down on the floor against the door to wait, I don't know why. Hate and fear were in my heart. Something noiseless, invisible, and relentless was doing its work in that room. I had a glimpse of the great void, the boundless, impersonal universe in which I was an atom, helpless, doomed, of no account.

My feet were very cold. I shivered on the floor, taking a certain pleasure in my own discomfort; and I went on hating God. He had been put so clearly before my eyes, as a person, a kind, loving Heavenly Father, that it was quite natural now for me to feel murderously towards Him.

I must have fallen asleep. A pair of arms lifted me from the floor. I realized that my father was carrying me upstairs, and that, therefore, my mother must be dead. She had escaped him. We were two helpless things in the grip of God, and I loved him and he was separated from me. He put me into bed and tucked the blanket round me, automatically, as if he were moving in his sleep. I dared not speak to him, his face looked queer and grey; I heard him go out of the room and down the stairs, I held my breath to listen for his footsteps, his faint footsteps in the terrible forsaken house.

The three days that followed were a blur of crêpe and flowers, of hushed voices and stealthy feet. My father sat hour after hour in my mother's room. Each time he came out there was a greyer tinge upon his face, as though it were covered with soot; yet he shaved carefully every morning, came down to breakfast and sat with the unopened newspaper in his hand, watching us, gently and absently, and now and then he took a gulp of coffee.

Automatically he went through the ordinary daily routine of the house. There was something terrible and humble about his punctilious performance of his duties. A woman would have behaved very differently, would have found a vent for her agony somehow, but he couldn't take to his bed or weep, or call a doctor to give him sedatives, he must just go on living as usual. Something within him could not give way. Only his voice seemed to have given out. He could not speak. When necessity demanded speech, it came through his moustache in a hoarse, halting whisper.

The boys couldn't keep up the strain imposed. For a day they sat in a huddled group on the stairs, then

they had to dissimulate. Behind closed doors, shamefacedly and solemnly, they played marbles and read story-books. Once Jerry forgot and shouted, naturally, the sudden yelp of youth, whereupon I flew into the room, slapped his face and burst into violent tears.

"You brutes, you horrid brutes! How can you laugh? Don't you care for anything?" I stormed, sobbing angrily.

"I didn't laugh," growled Jerry, and I flung out again. I suppose they felt I was right, for they put away their distractions dejectedly, with awe in their hearts for the superior sensibilities of women.

Still, I didn't blame them much, my anger had been a sudden *crise de nerfs*. They were only boys. Besides, they didn't love father the way I did.

Maybe I was vain of my love for him. Maybe I exaggerated it. If it had been the marvellous thing I thought it, I couldn't have hurt him so, in the end, could I? No, I must have deluded myself; I never loved him half enough. When it came to a choice between him and something I really wanted, I took that and gave him up. My staying at home with him, instead of going away to school, wasn't really done for him, wasn't altogether unselfish. I suspect that it was a piece of romantic self-indulgence. Doubtless it seemed to me a creditable and sweetly filial thing to do. Also, it gave me a feeling of maturity, and I liked to feel old.

I don't mean that I was entirely sentimental in the matter. If that had been the case, I couldn't have stuck it out after all the excitement was over. And I was extremely sensitive to his feelings, his moods, his wishes. That must have meant that I loved him to some extent. I like to think that it did. The thought comforts me

a little. I remember that all my strength seemed gathered together into a knot of acute sensation of agony, on the day of the funeral. My mother was put into the family vault, and as the coffin slid into place, he gave one queer, tearing sob, that seemed to shiver through the whole world, and I fainted. The sound of it made me faint. I don't know how. I had a blurred vision of many faces, of many eyes all turned towards the mouth that had swallowed the coffin, and at the same instant, on my father's cry, everything went blank.

I want to think that it wasn't just a lack of food and sleep, and the three days of funeral preparations, and the standing on my feet while being fitted for black clothes, and the long, slow drive in the closed carriage, that made me faint then. It couldn't have been just that, else why did I faint at the instant he cried, when I was in fresh air? No, I want to think that it was really a sudden sense of his agony that stopped my heart. As I say, the thought comforts me.

The next day, when they told me that we, the boys and I, were to go down to the farm, I refused. I worked myself into a fever, my temperature went up to 101 degrees, and even when they told me my father wanted me to go I said I wouldn't. I got my way. The boys went off, Jerry and Bud, to the farm, Dick back to school, and I was left. I didn't leave my father from that day until I was married to Binky.

There was nothing spectacular about his grief. He gave no sign, scarcely any sign of what was going on in him. Only his face grew greyer and more rigid with the effort to control the convulsing struggle of his mind, and his movements grew timid and still, as though he could not trust freedom to his hand, and he was silent.

His struggle for sanity went on in silence, buried far beneath his silence and the accurate automatism of his habits. I didn't know or understand, but I was frightened, and something warned me to keep away, to keep still. He didn't speak. I don't think he spoke for ten days after the burying of my mother. He would walk up and down the hall, up and down, up and down; and I would crouch on the stairs watching him, wishing hysterically that I could pray. I couldn't pray because I had thrown over God. There was, I reasoned obstinately, no one to pray to; but I remember a distinct desire for a string of beads, a desire to mumble prayers on a string of beads. Then my father would go up to his room, and I would watch him through the door as he took out his patience cards, start to lay them out on the table, and stop. He never got further than laying out two rows. He would stop and stare at the table and sit a long time staring. I remember it seemed uncanny to me that three times he stopped at the queen of spades, and then I noticed that he always stopped when the queen of spades turned up. I used to go in and stand quite close behind him, but he was unaware of my presence. Once I found him standing in the library with a lighted match held an inch or two before his face, just where the tip of a cigar would have been, but there was no cigar between his lips, and his eyes were fixed. He stood like that, motionless except for a slight sucking or puffing motion of the mouth, until the match burned down to his fingers and went out. The sensation of the flame that perhaps burned his finger made him drop his hand, and he began slowly to walk up and down again. I was very much frightened. It was like seeing a ghost. I must have grown hysterical

and queer after this, for a struggle seemed to begin between me and the silence; my father's silence, and the silence that spread from him through the house. I felt that the silence became alive, menacing, full of dreadful, grotesque things.

You see I was fighting God too all this time. I kept saying over and over to myself, that if God was God He was omnipotent, and personally responsible for all wickedness and all sorrow. Therefore He must be either cruel and wicked or the dupe of the devil, who made it impossible for Him to do what He liked. This was inconceivable. Therefore He was inconceivable. He didn't exist. It was the same old question, simple enough, just the same old rock on which Christianity has split, over which so many absurd storms of theology have raged, the incompatible equation of a holy and merciful God and sin and suffering.

I am sure that my father felt something of the same sort of thing. He would have believed if he could, for my mother's sake, I know. That separation of his mind from hers must have been very terrible to him. It must have constituted for him a very cruel temptation. He could have united himself with her in Heaven, by one little disgraceful act of will. Her belief that they would be reunited after death must have become added agony to him, when he was facing the loneliness of death and nothingness.

I must have understood something of what was going on in his mind during those days. Two voices out of his silence seemed to speak to me. One told me to keep away, the other begged me to come to him in spite of that forbidding barrier of grief. Finally, one night as I lay in the dark thinking, miserable, frightened,

and lonely, I heard two of the servants talking outside my door. "I can't stand it. I'm going to give notice," said one. "He'll go off his head," whispered another. I jumped out of bed, flew by them and downstairs without pausing. I rushed to his room, flung myself into his arms and began to sob loudly and more loudly. I remember the delicious relief of that crying, of making that noise. He pulled a quilt from his bed and wrapped it round me. He chafed my bare feet. I cried on and on, luxuriously.

"There, there, Joan darling," he murmured. What an acute ecstasy of pain and joy those words gave me! I had a perfect orgy of weeping. My self-indulgence was good for both of us, and after a time I upbraided him, straining him hungrily, to feel his firm shoulder and smell his face.

"You wouldn't speak to me," I scolded. "You must talk, you mustn't keep me away. I'm too frightened, too frightened." I didn't realize what I was doing, otherwise I should never have dared put things into words. "Mother's gone. God's gone. There isn't any Heaven, or anything after. I know, I know. I hate it. I'm frightened."

"Joan darling, my poor little girl!" Oh, the delicious nearness of him. I lay still in his arms, and gradually the same shyness that always has been between us, came over me again, but I had had the one outburst that made us companions in experience.

CHAPTER NINE

I DIDN'T see much of Jim during the three years after his mother's divorce. He came home for the holidays one Christmas, but he didn't go to any of our parties. Still, though he never talked to me about her, I have gathered a very definite impression as to how her adventure affected him. I know that when he came of age, just after his father's horrid death, he went at once abroad to see her, and I believe he would have kept in touch with her if it hadn't been for Louise and Mrs. Bowers. It wasn't, of course, the kind of thing that they would encourage. Louise told me that soon after they were married he asked her to go with him to Italy, and she refused. She didn't want to get within a thousand miles of that villa at Sorrento. It's difficult to understand, but I rather think she was afraid that his mother would get money out of him, and so she took a scandalized, virtuous line, and Jim gave in. He never broached the subject to her again. I imagine he forgave her heartlessness, almost, because he actually did care so much about keeping his wife immaculate. His father's disgraceful death, which he connected with Mrs. Van Orden's faithlessness, gave him a terror of liberty. You can see how he must have suffered, loving his mother as he did, and yet having to blame her for his father's disintegration. I can imagine the thoughts that passed through his mind while he watched that

wretched man dying of delirium tremens. I can almost forgive him his rigid insistence on conventions. Conventionality, appearing to him a safeguard, came to be an obsession with him. I believe Louise's perfect brand of it was one of the things that attracted him to her. He was athirst with the desire for purity, and he thought it existed in conventionality. Poor dear! I've no doubt, too, that my wildness caused him misgivings. He once said I reminded him of his mother. He hadn't the courage to love me, not until it was too late. I don't blame him. I understand the awful fuddle of his mind during those three years when he was growing into a man. I understand the futile questionings, the baffled dreams, the loneliness of his poor, passionate spirit. He tried religion. Dick told me that one year at Yale he, Jim, had a Bible Class. It seems so funny and pathetic. I see those sweet boys seriously trying to find out from the Bible what it was they wanted out of life. Perhaps he did find something there, but if he trusted God for a bit, his father's death spoiled that for him. Our experiences were somewhat the same in that way, only his were worse.

When I was eighteen I went to the "Yale Prom." Jim invited me, and Dick asked Sally Comstock. Phyllis was at home taking care of the family. It was the beginning of Mrs. Day's illness. Louise was in her convent in Paris, so Sally and I went together, and my father chaperoned us. I am glad now of that "Yale Prom." It is wonderful to me to think how happy I was; of the quite perfect delight of those four days. We arrived in New Haven on Saturday afternoon with a whole train-load of other girls, all sparkling, chattering, fluffy, curly, dimpled, dainty creatures, all with nothing in their heads but the idea of having a good time, and

with little delicate sentimental loves in their sweet hearts for the young men who were their hosts. I can imagine nothing more delicious and innocent than the romance of that week-end, than the three or four hundred little romances that made up the joyous crowd. I love America for the beautiful fun it allows to young people. From Saturday to Wednesday we kept it up. We danced all night, we laughed and sang and flirted lightly, and went to luncheons and teas in college rooms, all day. Of course, we didn't dance on Sunday night. On Sunday night we received in Dick's rooms, and some fifty young men came in to pay court to us, and Sally and I queened it for three hours, while my father sat in a corner smoking and watching and sometimes laughing aloud with us. I remember so vividly that room with its Turkish divans, its college banners, its dim lamps, the wood fire in the large fireplace, the many slim forms of young men lounging about, and Jim electrically there in the midst of them looking at me deeply now and then. Conversation died down about ten o'clock, and all but half a dozen boys whom we knew well, went away, and then we sat for an hour in the firelight on the floor, singing. We sang all the college tunes and negro melodies that we knew, and some favourites like "Kentucky Babe," and "Bring the Wagon Home, John," and "Mandy Lee," we sang over and over again, with wonderful variations in the harmony. Jim and Dick sang tenor, Tommy Dodge and George Armstrong bass, Sally and I alto, and the rest carried the air. We sang on and on, while the birch-logs crumbled in the grate and our hearts thrilled with vague emotion. I remember feeling then quite sure that I was going to marry Jim, and when at last he

and Dick had walked back with us through the clear, cold night, and said good-bye at the door of our hotel, I kissed my father all tremulously and flew up with Sally to bed. where I told her just how much I was in love.

But of course, the great ball on Tuesday night, the Promenade itself, was the event of the week. I danced one hundred and twenty dances, forty of them with Jim. There were two bands playing alternately, so that one didn't have any intermissions unless one wanted, and I didn't. At six o'clock my slippers were in ribbons, and I hobbled blissfully back with the rest of our little group to Jim's breakfast rooms for breakfast. My poor father had, of course, stuck it out, and was still with us, yawning dreadfully; but we kept it up hilariously over our coffee and eggs, kept it up until we were on the train for home. Jim had given me a bunch of violets every day that covered the whole front of my coat, and I carried the last bunch all the way back to Iroquois and pressed a few of them carefully in a book. It seemed to me I could never be so happy again, and I never have been. I was sure, so sure, that we loved each other, Jim and I. The interval between that "Prom" week and the following summer, when he came yachting with us for a fortnight, was spent in thinking of him. I embroidered sofa-cushions and knitted neck-ties for him, and I wrote poetry, not about him, but about the moon and silver birch-trees, and being in love. I used to read the Song of Solomon over and over, and I got through most of Browning and Shelley, and Keats, and Byron, and learned the "Sonnets to the Portuguese" by heart. I don't know if my father realized what was the matter with me. I suppose he did. We lived very

much together, and though we didn't talk a great deal, I know that he must have read many of my thoughts. One evening, I remember, when I kissed him good-night, he took my face in his hands and looked at it intently.

"Am I like mother?" I asked.

He shook his head. "Not very." There was a curious, grave look in his face, a look almost of apprehension. "You will have to take care," he said strangely.

"Take care?"

I waited for him to say more, but he only took me in his arms more abruptly than usual, in a tighter hug, and then with a "There, darling, run up to bed," he turned away. I looked down on him from the dim stairs, half-way up. He was standing by the hall fire, with his head bent, and his hands as usual clasped behind him. It was impossible to know what he was thinking. The silence into which he had lapsed was profound and palpable. I went on up to my room, and turning on all the lights stared at myself in the glass. I was pleasurably impressed by my father's concern. It was interesting to feel that there was something dangerous in my make-up, and I was a little disappointed to find the same small white face staring back at me. I pulled my hair down over my forehead in a curly tangle, and looked at myself in deep affection. And I succeeded, to my mind, in looking very wicked and fascinating. I smiled at myself, and simpered and frowned. I longed for jewellery to play with, but I had no jewellery. It was all very silly, and by the time I was ready for bed I was ashamed of myself, and in a sudden revulsion of feeling ran down to my father's room in my dressing-gown. He was playing patience. He always played

patience at night, and as I flung myself on him I remember hating those little cards with their red and black spots, and a terrible feeling of the waste of it all and the loneliness came over me. I was jealous for him and ambitious. His languor and his indifference appalled me. It seemed to me he should be doing great things in the world. What things? In what world? I don't know.

Jim Van Orden was certainly very attractive that summer when we all went yachting together. He was sunburned, and his hair, against the warm tan of his face, was golden, and his eyes were very blue, and his small body was very graceful and strong in its white flannels.

My father's yacht, the *Minnehaha,* was put into commission in June in New York Harbour. She was a very pretty little schooner, with room for a dozen young people. He was his own skipper with a crew of eight sailors. We cruised up the coast that summer, stopping at various bright, frivolous places like Narragansett Pier, Manchester-by-the-Sea, as far as Bar Harbour. Jim joined us about the middle of August. I remember those days of golden sunshine and sapphire seas and fresh, sweet winds. Phyllis was with us then, and Jerry and Bud and Dick, and others came and went, hopping on and off at different yacht clubs and piers in sandy harbours. My lasting impression of those days is one of delicious salt smells, the smell of the sea and of seaweed and tar and fish and steaming clams.

I remember best of all the last day Jim was with us. We had been becalmed off Cape Cod somewhere, and had gone ashore in the launch. It was a funny little place of scattered huts and bathing boxes, where marshes

came down to the beach. A long, very dilapidated pier stuck out into the sea, with a funny cabin on it where sailors could buy rope and fishing-tackle and lobsters and salt pork and cheese. Jim and I bought cheese and biscuits from the old sailor there, and went out to the end of the pier and sat down, dangling our legs over the still water. The sun was bright and hot, and the white sails of ships, becalmed, flapped loosely in the harbour. A square-rigged lumber schooner afar out seemed to have caught a vagrant breeze, and was moving slowly southward, all sails set. I could see my father sitting under the awning on the deck of the *Minnehaha*. Phyllis and the others had gone to play golf at the little club across the marshes. I was very happy sitting there in the sun with Jim, eating yellow cheese and biscuits. The sun made us blink and feel pleasantly sleepy. The tide was going out, and we could see the clam-diggers farther down the shore digging in the mud, their trousers rolled up to their knees.

"You're going abroad in October, aren't you?" asked Jim, after a long, sleepy pause.

"Yes."

"When are you coming back?"

"I don't know."

He cut me another bit of cheese off the large hunk with his penknife.

"It's been great — this cruise," he ventured.

I nodded.

"I suppose you will come back — look here, you're not going to stay?"

"Gracious goodness, what should I stay for?" I looked at him. His face flushed, and his eyes grew dark.

"Promise you'll come home in a year — two at most."

I laughed. "Of course I'm coming home in a year."

I was trembling with excitement. I waited for him to say it. I waited happily, fervently. I was eighteen and he was twenty. I wanted to be engaged to him right at once, that minute. He hesitated, and I grew angry. I threw my cheese into the water, and turning, kissed him somewhere near the corner of his mouth. We were in full view of all the sandy, sunny, clam-digging world and of the yacht of my father. I don't know why I kissed him like that. He grabbed my shoulders and kissed me back clumsily and shyly and fiercely, but it stopped him. It upset him and frightened him. In another minute we were both uncomfortable and embarrassed. I got up, shaking the crumbs out of my skirts and jamming my hat down over my eyes.

"Joan," he muttered huskily. I turned my back. It was impossible to look into his face.

"Come on," I said angrily, and walked off down the pier.

That night we all sat on the deck in the moonlight singing to Jerry's banjo — and the next morning Jim went away.

He went away without saying anything more to me except that I had promised to come back in a year. "I never promised," I said, laughing at him with a sick little feeling inside me. I watched his white figure going off in the tender. He was to take the train and go West to Jim Armstrong's ranch for a fortnight before college opened. He had one more year at Yale. That was the last I saw of him for five years.

PART TWO

CHAPTER ONE

THEY all called him "Binky." It seemed to me a dazzling impertinence. I felt that however much I might long to imitate their terse and flippant familiarity, I would never be able to call him Binky, and the ease with which they did it, all of them — Molly Tripp and Mrs. Hobbes and all the rest — removed them miles from me. I could never acquire the dry, reckless tone of these English army people; and how fascinating it was! Yes, it seemed to me witty and fascinating. How young I was, how gullible I must have been, how utterly romantic! A group of weary, stupid, plucky women, and their soldier men, living in exile, poised giddily on the edge of a great enigma; and taking it all in the well-bred British way, simply refusing to admit the existence of the horrid fact; these seemed to me wonderful people. You see, they had a quality that was new to me, the quality of extreme boredom, of well-regulated, disciplined boredom. They didn't care a hang about either God or the devil. A nickname for the Almighty would have perched as easily as Binky on their lips; only, they never thought about the Almighty. He didn't bother them. They had succeeded ages ago in staring Him out of existence. Their main occupation now was in staring life out of countenance. This perfect and assured flippancy made them seem to me infinitely superior, so secure and unapproachable as to be mysterious.

I must have been at that time incredibly enthusiastic. I was nineteen. My father and I had been travelling round the world, and we came on them, the dangerous Mrs. Hobbes, and little wizened Molly Tripp, who jingled all over with jewellery like a pedlar's cart, and Ruffles, whom I hated wistfully, and Binky, who seemed to me a god, and all the rest, in a little dusty place near the Afghan frontier. I was full of the poetry and colour that I had been imbibing, ripe for romance and for adventure — dangerously, deliciously ripe for adventure. I was very happy. I loved everybody and everything, myself included; my eyelashes and my nose gave me extreme pleasure. I had some ravishing clothes which delighted my heart; I remember one gauzy pink thing in which I had five different proposals in as many different languages.

And it was right into the midst of this clear, if shallow, pool of happiness that they dropped their rubbish. They used me; they gave me their unclean leavings. Even Binky didn't give me anything new and first-class in the way of feeling; he hadn't it to give. It had all been used. It was all second-hand; it all had the mark of the other woman on it.

I didn't know at the time. I scarcely suspected. People like that were beyond my comprehension. I had been constantly with my father for three years. I knew only his fine, simple nature; I didn't know there was such a creature as Mrs. Hobbes in existence, so finished, so complete, so immune.

Binky's real name in those days was Captain Gilbert Humphrey Fitzgerald Dawkins. He was in a Cavalry Regiment, and I fell in love with him at once, if not at first sight, then between first and second sight. I

don't think it necessary to analyse what falling-in-love means for a romantic girl. It is sufficient to say that he entirely upset my equilibrium, that he blotted out the past and took up with his own image the whole of the future. I forgot Jim Van Orden. I abandoned in one instant all my memories. I wanted to marry this man — that was all. Perhaps I wanted him more fiercely than most girls want men. I don't know. There's a convention abroad that women don't care for men with that physical longing that eats one's vitality away, but I suspect that this convention has been built up by women themselves, out of a lie, for their self-protection. Anyhow, although I was very proud and shy with Binky and capricious and moody, although I suppose I played the game of the coquette to some extent, luring him on and keeping him off, still there was nothing conventional in my feeling for Binky. It was quite an uncontrollable, wild feeling, a choking, dizzying, humiliating feeling.

I remember so well my suffering on our last day in India. I sat all the afternoon on the balcony outside my room, in the Taj Mahal Hotel, and scowled into the dazzling Bombay Harbour. Sampans floated softly on the pale, glassy water. He was, so I supposed, on the Afghan frontier, fifteen hundred miles north, and his personality seemed to crush me, even at that distance. His conjured image made me feel sick and faint; and we were sailing next day by the P. and O. for Marseilles. "I shall never see him again," I kept repeating to myself savagely. Carriages were passing swiftly beneath me along the dark red road, open carriages drawn by magnificent Arab and Australian horses, and occupied by Parsee ladies in brilliant silken veils that

flowed behind them. A strange scent rose from the date-palms and flowering bushes that banked the façade by the hotel. Everything was soaked in a queer, pungent perfume, that all but obliterated the savour of the sea. A military band was playing in the yacht club near by. A large vessel was coming into harbour from China, or possibly Siam, or New Zealand, and the romance of the Orient, mingling with my passionate sentiment, made my heart ache with an insatiable longing and curiosity and despair. I kept repeating: "I will never see him again," and he was already downstairs talking to my father. She had sent him down to Bombay to propose to me.

I thought of France and England as dull, grey places of monotonous streets, full of drab faces under queer hats, and then my mind flew with a flurry of sympathy back to Iroquois, where Jerry and Dick were, and Jim too; but the thought of Jim entered my head only long enough to be dismissed irritably. I did not want to go home, I wanted to go nowhere under the sun. I was sick with disappointment and bewilderment and jealousy. Yes, I must have been already jealous, for I remember Mrs. Hobbes kept appearing erratically and persistently in my mind, and behind her image lurked the thought, more or less clearly inarticulate, that it was impossible for any one who had tasted of the sharp flavour of this woman ever to care for a young girl like myself.

You see, I knew a good deal by this time, in a confused way. I knew about as much as "Maisie knew," in that story by Henry James; but my efforts to fit the pieces of the puzzle together were not as sure and instinctive as the child's were, because my heart and my vanity were so deeply involved. The tangle and the mys-

tery were only just clear enough to engage me in a disastrous struggle, a struggle between my pride and my infatuation. This much I knew, that I couldn't have him, except at the price of my pride. Ah, yes, they humiliated me, and she at least knew it! She must have known it. She couldn't have thought me such a child as not to be aware of the insult she put upon me. I lay it all at her door, because I feel sure Binky didn't realize. There is nothing cruel about Binky, and nothing subtle. He couldn't have understood the meaning of the affair. I know he didn't, from what he said afterwards.

Then there were other things that I knew. I knew that Binky was not good, as I understood goodness; but was quite wicked, perhaps even incurably bored with goodness; and this bit of knowledge added to his fascination. No, it wasn't his having played the part of a lover to the wife of another man that gave me the strength to refuse him, that first time. No, horrible as that seemed to me, it only made it the harder to give him up. It was something else, a complicated revulsion of feeling in which my sudden discovery that he was his uncle's heir had a part.

Poor Binky! it has taken me so long to understand him, and I did him such injury in thinking him a wickeder and more dashing and more intelligent man than he really is. After all, it wasn't his fault if I made him out to be a colossal figure, and dressed him up in all sorts of picturesque raiment which didn't fit him. I did the same with Joseph, and I've done the same all my life with hundreds of people. I believe Jim is the only man I ever saw clearly, and I let him go. I am like the dog in the fable, who let the bread

drop out of his mouth. I am always looking beyond the actual. Some one has defined romanticism as "looking beyond the horizon," and that is what I have always been doing. I am for ever believing that there is more in people than they really amount to, finding more meaning in things than really exists there, expecting more excitement from an experience than the experience can possibly supply; and so I call this the story of a romantic woman, the story of self-inflicted disappointment.

Well, I was excessively romantic about Binky, and it was partly due to the setting in which I found him.

It was wild and bare on the Afghan frontier, something like Job's wilderness, only no one wrestled with his soul there. The hills to the north that looked as if they were cut out of cardboard, scrawled a jagged line across the sky, and beyond this line was Afghanistan. I beheld my hero against a background of desert and frowning sandhills, amongst which appeared now and then the muzzle of a rifle and the savage, bearded face of a picturesque ruffian. He stood out well against such a background. In the direct line of a menacing gun-barrel, I could see him light a cigarette and play with his pony's nose. He seemed to me extremely reckless and dashing; and he was almost too good-looking, almost too surely the hero of dreams. It was true that he did his best to obliterate his looks; his hair was cropped short, he walked with a contemptuous slipshod fling of his superb body, and wore very old and shapeless clothes, but it did no good. He was elaborately handsome, and his carelessness made him the more unquestionably attractive.

His hair was just faintly tinged with grey in those

days, and he had a vivid, bright look on his face, a look of clear good-humour with a dash of mockery, that was very charming. I first saw him on the polo-ground. He came riding across the field with his saddle-girth burst in two, balancing precariously and grinning. His scarlet shirt was streaked black with perspiration, his face under his topi was of the unpleasant hot shade, relieved by daubs of dirt. He was certainly not beautiful then, but the long line of his wet, red shirt and worn breeches pleased me unaccountably, and the way he sat his ungirthed pony, careless, secure, quizzical, seemed to me unspeakably attractive. I listened for his voice. It had a dry, toneless quality; and his words, half of them never came beyond his moustache. He spoke as though it didn't matter whether any one heard him or not, as though speech was a bore and there was nothing on earth worth saying anyhow.

None of them could be said to talk much; there was never any conversation that I remember. Even the women seemed to think it unnecessary to be entertaining. I had always believed that one thing woman had to do was to talk; brilliantly, interestingly if possible, but anyhow to talk. Girls in Iroquois thought a great deal of a good talker. Phyllis was the only girl I knew at home who got along without talking, but all these women were the same. They threw out remarks now and then, most of the time unintelligible to me, and usually received with laughter, dry, short, and equally unintelligible. Mrs. Hobbes sometimes said nothing at all for hours, and Mrs. Hobbes was certainly fascinating. I saw that plainly enough at once, though she did look something like a shark made of ivory. All she had to do was to look through those narrow golden eyes of

hers and smile a little, to make you feel her power. When she smiled it was as though a light from an outside source had touched her for a moment, had produced by its fleeting radiance the illusion of movement upon her features, that were in themselves immovable. She was like marble, all cold, with silvery tints in her skin and copper in her stiffly coiffed hair. Only in her thin, curved lips was there any warmth, and her voice had a ringing quality, sometimes musical, sometimes harsh as the clang of metal. One could not admit that she was beautiful with that high-arched nose. It was too large. But she was more than beautiful; she was inexplicably menacing and alluring. One could imagine that she knew everything, was a golden receptacle for secrets; yet she talked like a very ordinary person, and had no affectations, unless it was her immobility. She dressed severely, and in my opinion badly. They all dressed badly, the women, even Lady O'Donald, my hostess at Government House; but their clothes didn't seem to matter any more than their lack of conversation. They had a wonderfully secure touch with men. The men and women treated each other like — like, not quite like brothers and sisters, but certainly not as American women and American men. I couldn't put to it myself. There was here a certain *camaraderie* that took everything for granted, seemed to have got beyond the business or the game of flirtation. At first I was mystified; then, puzzling it out, I came to the conclusion that the women were all bored by the continual presence of the same men; then suddenly I discovered that underneath the casual, desultory converse, love-affairs were going on. That took my breath away, then made me feel acutely miserable, envious, and ashamed of being envious.

The fact that married women had love-affairs wasn't in the bare sense a piece of news, but as a reality with which one came casually in contact, it was a revelation.

My initiation was accidental, and it so happened that the edge of the shock was taken off for me by Mrs. Hobbes, in a peculiarly cold, enlightening way. I had surprised Mrs. Tripp on the back verandah of her bungalow with her hand on a subaltern's curly head, in an attitude that suggested a light kiss just past, or about to be given. I had fled out into the garden, and finding Mrs. Hobbes there alone, had blurted out something about being mortified, some ridiculous apologetic nonsense, quite uncalled for, which she easily enough understood.

"Molly won't mind," she said shortly, with a contemptuous curve of her fine lips.

"Won't she?" I gasped.

"Lord, no! Why should she?" Her great pale eyes pitied me. I think she made up her eyelashes, perhaps not. Anyhow she used her eyes with disconcerting skill.

I half closed mine, and saw again the flushed young man scrambling to his feet from his half-kneeling posture by Molly's chair. I saw more: an abyss opening before me.

Molly Tripp was the wife of the General in command of the station. She was obviously a good sort. I found her in the beginning a perfect dear, and to this day I like her. I have always liked her. She is so sporting, so generous and kind and sweet-natured. How on earth she has managed to keep sweet-natured I can't imagine, but she has, and her heart is as fresh and untouched as her face is withered. She was withered and emaciated

even then, with a wrinkled, vivacious face, and scrawny neck; and she will go on being withered and light-hearted to the end of her life, and her scraggy, haggard charm will avail always with every one except Henry, her husband, who is a beast, and insults her in public.

She was forty then, when I was nineteen, and next to Lady O'Donald the senior lady in the station, and there was no dignity and no wickedness in her. Her flirtations were utterly frivolous and absurd. Claire Hobbes knew that. Any one and every one ought to have known that Molly's actions were always as indiscreet and innocent as the light of day.

And just because I felt this about her, the kiss which seemed hovering in the air between those two was the more astonishing. Its thoughtless, indiscreet brightness meant so much more than anything furtive or dark.

Mrs. Hobbes continued to smile with uplifted eyebrows, and I saw that she must be smiling at the horror and confusion in my own face. I stammered again, making myself the more amusing to her.

"I'm sorry — I was asked for tennis," I burst in. "Lady O'Donald dropped us here. Captain Dawkins was with me. He ——"

"Binky! Oh, Binky doesn't matter. Molly's little affairs ——" she laughed. "You quaint dear; she confides in Binky."

I stared, appalled by a sudden question.

If Molly Tripp went in for harmless, light-hearted affairs, what did Claire Hobbes go in for?

I gazed at the other's chiselled face under the uncompromising line of her riding-hat. I took in the slightly dilated nostrils, the marvellous texture of the skin, the

firm, clear line of the lips with their slight, hard smile; and I believed it was then — on Molly's tennis-lawn, with Molly herself emerging from the verandah, her white hat tilted rakishly over her aged unconcerned little face — just then, while Mrs. Hobbes lightly tapped her riding-boot with her crop and stared back at me with that cruel, appraising glance, that I began to dislike her.

I know now what that glance meant. She was even then sizing me up for Binky, and her glance was one of calculating approval. I should do. I should do so well that to give him to me would cost her horrid pain. Yes, way down inside of her frozen self, she was suffering too and hating me, because she was going to give him to me, and because she was afraid he would like it.

CHAPTER TWO

I MARK the beginning of that process of going to pieces that I keep alluding to, as dating from a certain night when Binky gave me a dinner-party in his bungalow. It was a very select little dinner-party; my father was not there, nor anybody's husband; only choice spirits like Claire Hobbes and Molly Tripp and Ruffles; and it was then, out of sheer pique and chagrin, that I gave way. I longed to be fast, so that I might attract him.

I had been feeling vaguely unhappy ever since my contretemps with Mrs. Hobbes in Molly's garden. My ignorance and awkwardness hampered and irked me. My enthusiasm seemed as absurd as ill-fitting clothes, and my shy response to Binky's attentions seemed clumsy, futile methods of attraction compared to the harsh glitter and finished, distrait rudeness of these Englishwomen; but that night all my misery came to a head. And when I got home to my plastered room in Government House, I cried tears of mortification.

Poor, wretched, absurd creature! As if my being worldly-wise would have made me one bit more attractive to Binky! His own simplicity ought to have been obvious enough when he came to me, to apologize for them. I remember now his boyish remorse, his contrite confusion. Why didn't I then and there understand that underneath his gallant exterior he was rather a stupid, nice boy! I suppose it was her personality that coloured him in

my eyes. It was impossible for me to conceive of an Adam dwelling, as it were, in the bosom of that wonderful Eve without contamination. It seemed to me that the friend and knight-errant of Mrs. Hobbes must be a bold, bad man. And then, besides this, I wanted to believe him to be a bold, bad man.

You see, I wanted to be one of them because he was one of them. Though everybody made a fuss over me, just because everybody made such a fuss over me I felt out of it. Up to the night of the dinner, they all put on airs for my benefit. The men laid themselves out to please me. They never treated me to the casual and terse good-humoured ragging that they served up to their own women. When I entered a group, it bestirred itself and made conversation. How I longed for the compliment of their flippancy, and their silence!

My father could match any of them in reticence. In the midst of my own babble, I could always feel the support of his silence. They were afraid of him; I saw that and was glad. I didn't want him to make advances to them, didn't care how aloof he was; but for myself, I wanted to be one of them, I wanted to be what they were, only more so, because of Binky.

He alone, of the whole lot, had treated me casually, because it was, I suppose, impossible for him to treat any one otherwise, even if his life depended on it. And from him alone I wanted the differentiating touch of reverence. In his case, I got the indifferent air, and it piqued and angered me. He was lackadaisical and cynically frivolous with every one. He was always teasing and ragging, muttering little jokes to one and another, and chuckling to himself. Never did he allow himself

to be drawn into a serious discussion, never did he evidence any emotion of any kind except mild amusement and an occasional flare of temper. And I thought, because I wanted to think so, that this airy persiflage covered great depths of thought and feeling. What fired my imagination was the prospect of this cynical worldling becoming for me a simple, earnest lover. If a man so reckless and gay could for one moment, under the influence of a rare feeling, be tender and serious, how inexpressibly sweet that would be. I beheld in my mind's eye that swift, scathing intellect melted, that mocking face transformed with sympathy. I heard that well-bred, muttering voice vibrating with restrained passion, and my heart flamed at the thought.

How funny it seems now! Poor Binky — or rather, poor me! Binky is happy enough. He never went to pieces. As he is, so he has been and ever shall be; and he isn't even aware of what a legend I wove around him.

He lived by himself in a small bungalow next to the Officers' Mess. It was a very small bungalow, and my impression of its interior is a confusion of dogs and drinks, and chintz curtains sent out by his mother. There were puppies and bottles everywhere, and upholstered chairs covered with the maternal flowered chintz. One was conscious too, somehow or other, of the close proximity of many horses. If the bungalow was small, the stables were large. All the servants' houses had been turned into stables, and in them dwelt the eight polo ponies and three hunters which were the absorbing interest of his life, and the source of his debts.

Dinner was served from the mess kitchen next door,

and it was rather a bad dinner, but there was so much drink and so much talk that no one seemed to mind. Ruffles began at once, as we sat down. He accused Molly of having had twins *sub rosa,* and how did she do it, he demanded, without ever letting on? He had heard one squealing that very afternoon when he called. Oh — he could tell a baby from a pomeranian. Yes, he could really. This sound hadn't the slightest resemblance to a puppy's yelp. Now, was it quite good form to have twins at all, much less to have them like that without telling? He had grave suspicions from Henry's behaviour that afternoon, that he (Henry) was a mystified parent. Come, had she told Henry, or had she kept it dark?

How I hated Ruffles! I could have killed him, and he absolutely ignored me, just rattled on, teasing Granny, as he called Mrs. Tripp, until she gasped and shrieked, and sending Mrs. Hobbes off into uncontrollable fits of laughter. I had never seen Claire Hobbes laugh before, but under Ruffles's cocked eye she let herself go, the tears streamed down her face, and when Binky tried to stem the tide, she merely gasped, "Oh, Lord — Binky, do laugh. For God's sake laugh!" and went off again.

No one paid any attention to me. I stared at my plate, wondering if sometime and somehow this sort of thing might seem funny to me, and feeling a perfect fool. If every one else is laughing, the one who doesn't see the joke must feel an idiot. I wanted to do something to Ruffles. I loathed his complacency, his perfect impudence. He semed to me vulgar and con-

ceited, and I marvelled that Molly Tripp could allow him to take such liberties.

Ruffles and I are friends now.

He offended my vanity that night as it had never been offended before. When I tried to say something, he simply didn't listen, turned his shoulder, and began ragging Molly over again. His deviltry made me sick, but all the time he was ragging Molly, I knew that he liked her enormously, and I suppose underneath it all, I wanted that compliment too, the compliment of being admired by a clever little bounder whom I hadn't the strength of character to despise.

I don't mean to say that Ruffles actually is a bounder; he is really what men call "one of the best"; but I thought him one then, and he still looks a bit of an outsider. He is rather slight and small and hard, and he gives the impression of great elasticity, as though his limbs and his muscles were of india-rubber. He is slightly bow-legged, which, after all, is a small price to pay for being one of the finest polo-players in the world. He has an amusing face. One of his eye-brows is higher than the other, which gives him somehow the air of a sportive puppy, and there are two deep lines on either side of his mouth, like elongated dimples. He hasn't much hair, but what he has is grey, stiff, grizzled hair, like nigger's wool, and he has a wild taste in neckties and socks. Nothing will ever temper his love for brilliant neckties and socks.

He tells me now that he wanted me himself, but I don't believe him. I never believe anything he says, but what he does say is very entertaining all the same. He is a quaint mixture, a Roman Catholic and an international polo-player, and an authority on birds.

Sometimes we refer to those days on the frontier. He says he was watching me all the time, and was awfully amused to see how I was taking the Binky-Hobbes affair. He didn't think I'd swallow it, had never been so surprised in his life as when he heard we were engaged. He watched the process of my going to pieces, what he calls my growing up, with delight, because he thought all the time that it was bringing me within his reach. Now, he has got over that idea too.

You see what a long way I have travelled since that dinner. It seems wonderful to me that I could have suffered as acutely as I did then. There was a lot more of the same sort of thing after dinner. Molly, I remember, had on a gorgeous petticoat, and then there was the whole subject of the bed. Ruffles, it seemed, had bought her bed, and it squeaked. He had paid seventy-five rupees for it, and it squeaked so that he couldn't sleep. He was sure Henry's ghost must haunt the thing. It was fatal for a bachelor to try and sleep in a great connubial bed like that. Wouldn't she take it back. Claire Hobbes here interposed with some remark about Molly having dispensed with the need for it, whereat they all roared. I didn't understand, but I felt myself blushing, and as they all looked for an instant rather guiltily in my direction, I grew more and more crimson. It was horrid.

Binky, as I said before, did his best to head them off and draw them in and hold them up, but he didn't succeed in doing much more than let me know he was ashamed of them, by coming to my rescue with awkward platitudes, darting funny glances of consternation about him. I felt that he must, all the same, despise me for not paying them back in their own coin, for not showing

myself mistress of the hilarious situation, and his apology next morning was a comfort.

It was given in the dark of a very wintry five o'clock, while we drove to the meet. He had established the right to call for me at Government House and drive me out, every hunting morning, but on this morning, such was my sense of defeat that I scarcely expected him to turn up. I remember standing in the verandah, waiting and shivering inside my fur coat, and thinking that if he didn't come I could always pretend I had not intended to hunt that morning. I had dressed myself without help. No one would know. You can imagine, then, when I heard the wheels of his spindly trap and the irregular tap of his pony's skittish hoofs, how relieved I was. And when I found him more solicitous, devoted, and flattering than ever before, I loved him for what I termed to myself his generosity. It actually seemed to me noble of him not to mind my stupidity of the night before, and with a full revulsion of feeling I gave myself up to happiness. Yes, certainly that icy-cold drive before dawn was one of the happiest hours of my life. I remember how the pale day, stealing over the parched country like a grey spirit, thrilled me with a sense of mystery. It was very cold, and he tucked the sheepskin rug round my feet solicitously, and informed me he had beer and sandwiches under the seat for me to drink and eat on the way back. And then he went on to say that he felt like thrashing Ruffles, and would I forgive him for introducing such a bounder, such an out-and-out cad, but, really, he hadn't known the man was such a swine. And as he talked on I grew more and more blissful. We drove through an uncanny world of half-light. The shadowy forms of bullocks, and

silent, hooded villagers, loomed spectrally through the dust and mist. And in that strange country, passing through straggling throngs of weird, alien folk, we two seemed very intimate and alone, and after he had exhausted his apologies and I had denied being anything but vastly entertained at dinner, we grew absurd and light-hearted. And I loved him too for being gay at five o'clock in the morning. His profile, revealed to me under the hood of the trap, in the light of the dawn, seemed to me the handsomest I had ever seen, and the slight stoop in his pink-coated shoulders thrilled me unspeakably.

I rode his best hunter, and was in at the finish of the wretched jackal; and afterwards, standing in the road, dusty and sweaty, and divinely happy, I drank half his bottle of beer, and singled Ruffles out with what I considered a peculiarly clever little nod.

I remember his saying, as I climbed again into his trap:

"They're all lookin' and wonderin', because I don't do this sort of thing much, you know," meaning by this sort of thing, myself.

I was elated by his attentions, which made me conspicuous, and for two days after this, while he dogged my footsteps, quite obviously trying to screw up courage to propose, I toyed with him delightedly, sure of my conquest, rapturously, divinely sure, and then it was that I came upon the bewildering revelation.

Lady O'Donald was giving a garden party in honour of some native prince, and I was late in arriving on the scene. I was hurrying across the lawn to join her under the distant "shamina," where she was receiving turbaned gentlemen, when I ran into Molly and Mrs. Hobbes. I

came swiftly up behind their hibiscus bush, and caught the sound of my own name and stopped.

"You seem to have fallen a victim, too," Mrs. Hobbes was saying.

"She's perfectly adorable." Molly Tripp, I repeat, was a dear.

"How old is she?"

"Nineteen, I believe."

"Lord!" Mrs. Hobbes's voice took on a metallic ring. "If I were nineteen, with that face and five millions, what wouldn't I do?"

"You do quite enough as it is, my dear."

"Nineteen! All the same, I suspect that air of innocence. Those eyes have bowled over too many men not to know what they're doing."

"I don't agree with you. She's absurdly unconscious. You're a little bored, aren't you, about Binky? Why make him dance such frantic attendance on her?"

The emerald-green lawn and the scarlet-coated servants and the dotted forms of white-flannelled tennis-players blurred suddenly.

"He likes it," enunciated the icy voice; "and besides——" Pause, and then in a smaller, tired tone: "Binky must marry some day. It might as well be now. Here's his chance."

And will you believe it, as I stole away back to the house, I could for the moment hear nothing, think of nothing, but the pain, the undeniable, furiously weary pain in that hateful voice, and it was because of that pain that I was turned completely adrift. It was all too much for me.

I wandered weakly back to the house and threw myself on my bed and stared at the ceiling, which was miles

high and covered with cobwebs. The sound of the police-band playing "Under the Shadows," or some such tune, came through the open windows, and I found myself, after a time, thinking of Major Hobbes, little red-faced jocular Major Hobbes. My mind dwelt on him.

You must remember that it was not so very long since Phyllis and Louise and I had all vowed together in the middle of Louise's little baby-white bed, never to marry a man who had ever cared for any other woman the slightest bit. It was not that we demanded men who were virgin in body, we didn't know anything about being anything else, we demanded them virgin in mind and heart; and we thought our chances of getting what we wanted were exceeedingly good, about a hundred to one against.

Picture yourself the pride and ignorance of my youth, and remember the loyalty of my father and mother one to another, and you will have some inkling of my state of mind. I had no data to go on. Nothing but a religious upbringing, a reverence for marriage, vague, horrid fears, and a longing for this man. Mrs. Hobbes and Binky swam before me, indistinctly coupled, terribly attractive and well-matched. Their special relationship I was incapable of labelling, but they were coupled together in my mind as disembodied spirits, romantically and beautifully.

That they were wicked was an inevitable conclusion, deduced from the fact that she was another man's wife, but their wickedness partook of no physical suggestion to disgust me. Its abstractness made it positively attractive and enviable. I was not disillusioned, far from it, nor was I seriously shocked. I was quite definitely angry and offended because another woman

who knew all the meaning of love and of life, had a prior claim to him, and was disposing of him to me. I was consumed with jealousy, enraged by the insult they two together, as it seemed, had offered me, and terrified by the knowledge that I still wanted him.

Yes — more than ever I wanted him, and with him the high and passionate experience which his love represented.

CHAPTER THREE

THE torment of that Binky-Mrs. Hobbes situation partakes always in my memory of the smell of Bombay, a steamy, hot smell of spices, perfumes, dust, and the droppings of animals all stewing together in the sun. I have the same pungent, tickling sense in my nose now, as I think of it, and for years an odour even faintly similar has always called up the painful memory. My suffering was so very acute there on the balcony of the Taj Mahal Hotel, that I didn't think of moving into the cool shadow of the tiled room, but sat outside in the reflected glare, holding my damp head in my hands and thinking deliriously. I wanted him so — but not like that. It was terrible to feel that I should never, under any circumstances, be sure that he, of his own initiative, wanted me.

I was still floundering helplessly in the mess of it, when the door opened across the room behind me, and my father entered. I turned as he came to me. He looked tired and hot. His loose silk clothes stuck to him in places, and he mopped his forehead with a large bandanna handkerchief. His forehead, I noticed, was flushed red under his whitening hair.

"Captain Dawkins is here." I turned from him again quickly and stared dizzily through narrowed eyelids out over the languid, unreal sea, whose colour and savour were obliterated by the downpour of the sun.

He came out on the balcony and stood beside me, leaning forward, his hands on the railing. The façade of the hotel cut off the sun behind us, lending us a safe strip of shadow, the edge of which lay along the middle of the red road beneath. I waited, while he straightened up again, and with a characteristic gesture began pulling his moustache gently first on one side, then on the other. I could feel, for all his quiet and deliberation, that he was profoundly disturbed.

"He has asked leave to propose to you. You must decide for yourself. Your mother might have advised you. I don't know. You must decide. I want you to be happy."

I rose unsteadily and put my cheek against his. I was nearly as tall as he. I clung to his arm, my hands clasped round it, and we contemplated the situation together silently.

"I had not thought of your marrying an Englishman," he ventured again, after a moment. I drew away and looked in his face, and the pain in his eyes, the weary languor in his face, that he had so completely obliterated from his voice, recalled to me the days after my mother's death, when I had vowed never to leave him. I knew now that I should leave him some time, if not for this man then for another, and it came as a shock to me, that there was a force in the world stronger than my love for him. One of the central pivots in the machinery of existence seemed suddenly to have gone wrong. I was troubled and bewildered by a multitude of visions, of temptations, of hopes.

I kissed him nervously, and buried my face in his coat. I was a little ashamed.

"You're very young. I don't quite see you as a

duchess, somehow." For a moment, in the turmoil of my mind, I didn't take in the meaning of this last remark. Then it penetrated, making everything all at once more lucid, separating things queerly, and my reply, though not spoken aloud, was concise enough. "No — I don't want to be a duchess. That is what they would all expect me to do —' to marry a duke.' "

I don't mean to suggest that my dislike of being a duchess was sufficient to make me throw over Binky. Certainly not. Other things being satisfactory, I would certainly not have baulked at the swallowing of that prize-pill; but the fact that my pride was already roused to an abnormal pitch by the interference of Mrs. Hobbes in this affair, gave the point of the dukedom undue and perverse importance. To receive from the slender, disdainful hands of Mrs. Hobbes a duke as well as a lover — that choked me. I stood there strangling on that dizzy balcony. Nevertheless, I knew that if only Binky would get her out of the way, shove her off somehow, avow her to me frankly, and put her by in her place definitely on a top shelf, if he would only do this, then I should swallow it all. And it was with that last reserve, that poor little entrenchment all ready and waiting to be taken by storm, that I went to him.

"He's in the sitting-room," my father had said, while I was mentally choking. I felt his eyes follow me wistfully. Passing my dressing table, I snubbed the impulse to powder my nose, and hurried into the next room.

He was standing with his back to the lowered window-screens that let into the mild dimness of the big, bare room, little blinding lines of light. He was dressed in a grey flannel suit, rather dusty and travel-creased, and

his appearance gave me a distinct shock. He was quite as handsome as I remembered him, but the bronze of his skin, the white of his teeth and blue-green of his eyes, had a strange stirring physical quality, a quality both compelling and repulsive, that did not exist in my memory of him. As he came forward, I noticed for the first time a scar on his forehead, and my eyes were held by the red, moist line on his neck where his collar rubbed, and I was acutely conscious of his perspiring body.

"No end of people sent messages," he was saying. "Molly Tripp loaded me down with 'em — I can't remember what they were. You know the sort of thing. Phipps and Dicky and Bobs all sent their hearts in little bundles." He laughed. He was very evidently embarrassed, and his confusion pleased me. I had never seen him like this before. He kept darting shy glances at me and then looking away. The boyish, bright timidity on his face was comical. It made me wonder. It both pleased and displeased me. As a tribute to myself it pleased, but it shed a new and disconcerting light on his character. I had expected him to be a most accomplished lover. It occurred to me now that he couldn't be so very wicked or so very wise about women after all. What, then, of that past experience of his that so impressed me?

I'm sure that it was then that I had my first suspicion of him, of his being one of those people who go through experiences without ever experiencing much of anything. As I watched, from the depths of my wicker chair, his nervous, lackadaisical movements, I had for one instant a flash of insight, I even half articulated the accusation "shallow," and then as my eyes dwelt on

his superb self, so full of potential fire, and heard his quick voice enunciating little terse words in that, to me, exquisite diction of the well-educated Englishman, I dismissed my suspicion. It was impossible for me then to trust my instinct against the evidence of my eyes and ears. And how was I to know that he was merely one of his class, the complete and meaningless output of a very finished system? An American like that, of equal brilliance and attractiveness, would have achieved it by some rare innate quality, by some splendid energy of his own.

He began walking about the big cement room, flinging his legs aimlessly as though to shake off his shoes, and evidently trying to screw up his courage.

"I've got to go back tonight. You know what I've come for, I s'pose?" He turned to me with an effort to obliterate all expression from his face and a straightening movement of his shoulders. Then, as he looked down on me, he smiled charmingly. "Oh, my dear, you do look ripping like that. Your hair is like velvet with little crinkles." He beamed down on me in that quick sunny way of his, and my heart fluttered. I did love that sunny look of his so, and I still like it. It's the very nicest thing about Binky. It means nothing, absolutely nothing but good health and a vacuum where his imagination ought to be, but it is nice, very nice, just in itself, and you must always think of him with it, spreading from him and about him like a nimbus.

"I wrote to your father," he went on, turning half away. "But before I ask you anything, I want to tell you something, something about myself." His momentary solemnity gave way to the mockery he always summoned to cover embarrassment. "It's a kind of little con-

fession." He laughed, drew a chair across the shining floor, and sat down near me.

I must have beamed too then, for a weight was lifted suddenly. He was going to tell me everything, and it would come right after all. I would forgive. What could I not forgive if he confessed to me? That confession would prove the truth of the happy tribute of his admiring glance, it would prove that he cared. My anger had all ebbed away. I gripped my hands together to keep from throwing them out towards him.

"I'm not such an awfully bad chap. Not so very different from other fellows." It was not a good beginning. I felt slightly chilled. Why this self-justification? Why excuse? I didn't want him to be ashamed. I only wanted him to acknowledge the past and say he loved me best. I wanted the tribute of his confidence, but I didn't want him to defile the dignity of his other affair. Mine should be the honour of replacing the other, of obliterating, not a shameful but a beautiful image. My thoughts raced ahead, putting into his mouth the words I wanted him to say, and then I realized that he was speaking his own words.

"I've only got a little more than my pay, you see. We're devilish poor in our family. Have been for ages. Estates all entailed, and, of course, you can't be in a cavalry regiment and live like a hermit. You see what I'm driving at. It's disgusting, I know. I suppose you'll think it's beneath contempt, being in debt. You despise me, don't you? I can see it in your eyes."

I managed to murmur: "Despise you? No, of course not." I was utterly confused.

But he didn't believe me, and went on. "You see, I wanted you to know the worst about me." It was really

very painful for him. He was scarlet. "I owe about five thousand pounds." He plunged into gloom.

And I was so surprised that I could think of nothing to say. So this was his confession.

It could not be. It must be just a preamble, a leading up to the real subject. But he had said he wanted me to know the worst, and he considered this to be the worst. Doubtless it was the worst, and he needn't have told me at all. I didn't want to hear about his sins, I wanted him to place me in his life along with that other woman. I wanted him to make it clear to me, all of it. It was ridiculous of him to tell me about his debts. I laughed.

He looked up at the sound of my laugh. "You don't quite despise me?"

"Oh, no." I dismissed the subject lightly, wanting to get on to the seriously interesting thing.

"You see, I don't want your father to pay them; I only wanted you to know." I shivered. So he had thought about my father paying his debts. The idea had come into his head to be repudiated. The thought of my father's wealth was in his mind, uppermost in his mind. His own poverty and my wealth; but, of course, why hadn't I thought of that before? I was an heiress! And my father had said just now something about my being a duchess. It was the same old story. They had told me at home. It was what the world expected of me; what Iroquois, on the one hand, and Mrs. Hobbes, on the other, expected of me. But no one of that set had ever told me that their Binky was heir to a duke. They had taken a mean advantage of me. I was in love with him already. I was in love with him, and he didn't even think of my being jealous of

that other woman, so he couldn't care, not one rap.

I got up from my chair and walked over to the window. All the anger that had been smouldering under my hope, blazed up now. I saw it all. I was sick with humiliation.

"So you are going to be a duke, some day?" I threw the words jerkily at him, over my shoulder.

"I suppose so. You see, my uncle hasn't any children, and ——"

I cut him short. "I understand that you are proposing to me. Am I right?" I turned, surveying him coldly, by a tremendous effort.

"Yes, you are. I — you — you must have seen how you attracted me — you must have seen how awfully I liked you." He moved a step nearer. "Oh, my dear, I'm an ass — I can't say things." I burst into tears. He stood irresolute. He was floored. What on earth could I be crying about? Binky is horribly afraid of tears. He hates to see weak things suffer. He is very tender-hearted when you make an obvious spectacular appeal to his sympathy. His sympathy now came uppermost. He took me very gently and nicely in his arms. His impulse was to soothe, protect, and encourage.

"There, there, kiddy dear, never mind. If you don't like me, never mind. Don't take it so hard."

For one moment I lay there deliciously, my face against his coat, hoping against hope that by some miracle he would understand, would give me my proof; but his little muttered, caressing words, sweet as they were, put the final touch to my despair, and I pulled away, baring my face, with its tear-stains, to his eyes.

"No, it's no use; you don't understand. It doesn't

matter. I don't know why I cried. Please go away. I can't marry you; I don't want to marry you. It's only nerves!"

I said too much. I realized I was saying too much. A clever man would have seen through it, but Binky isn't clever, poor dear!

He slunk away, and I watched him, scarcely able to keep from rushing to bring him back. I might just as well have done it then.

CHAPTER FOUR

I UNDERSTAND perfectly now what I did not understand then. It has put itself together, bit bit by bit, until it is all quite complete. I see how inevitable and, from their point of view, how right it was. I don't mean right in the sense that it satisfied her conscience or his. You must remember that they are more civilized than I. They neither of them possess a conscience, but their course of action in regard to me satisfied what they have in place of it, a rigid and absolute sense of the ultimate fitness of things.

Claire was here a couple of months ago. We get on rather well. Why shouldn't she come? Binky likes having her here. She's so just the right sort of person for this place; and, of course, it's a great score from his point of view to get Britton. Britton scarcely goes anywhere, you see, and she brings him. I suppose from Binky to Britton could be called promotion; anyhow, as Ruffles so nicely put it, Britton wiped Binky's eye for him long ago, and there's no question now of her letting me hand him back to her.

I think Claire almost pities me now. There she has the advantage. I can't pity her. I can only admire her pluck. Really, she's quite wonderful in her way, and her complexion is as perfect as ever. You'd think all the bitterness that she has tasted would have withered her lips, but it hasn't. You'd imagine that all the dust of disillusion that has passed over her would have

dimmed and speckled her shining surface. Not at all. She's as impervious to the deposits of time as a glazed china vase. She allows no vestige of despair or discontent to settle visibly upon her. I suppose she turns her complete cynicism on to herself daily, as a kind of vacuum cleaner.

We had tea on the south terrace the other afternoon alone, she and Binky and I. Binky had his arm in a sling. Every one else was shooting, and it wasn't until the very middle of tea — I had my cup half-way to my lips — that it struck me as at all strange, our being there, quite placidly together, we three. It was a remarkably still afternoon for October, still and golden and quite warm in the sun. The air was crystal clear, and the yellow leaves of the beeches at the bottom of the tennis-lawns were motionless. It was her kind of an afternoon, and truly she was good to look at, sitting as still as marble with her head outlined against the grey stone of the south wall. In that sudden moment I gazed at her motionless head desperately. My eyes clung to it for the support of my brain. It was so fixed, so proud, so untarnished, that it gave the lie to my sudden overwhelming sense of unreality. She saved me, just the look of her. One couldn't, you know, accuse her of being base, or vulgar, and so one came back to the same conclusion that everything was as it should be.

I remember, as I lifted the cup again to my lips, that it seemed an age since the last sip. I had been all the way back to my mother's room, and I seemed to return from a great distance to hear their voices going on about horses. They mostly do talk about horses, she and Binky. The technical completeness of her vocabulary in this respect is amazing. I couldn't attempt to repro-

duce it for you. I can't even understand it. I didn't understand then, or try to; but the staccato tune of the short sentences they tossed to one another acted on my nerves as a tonic.

One can't blame Claire Hobbes or even criticize her. One doesn't accuse a sausage machine of being unkind because it grinds up little animals into sausage-meat. I don't mean to be nasty, but Claire is as inexorable as that. She fulfils herself perfectly and obeys the laws that have made her, and the laws that have made her are the laws of English society.

You see, it was an established fact that Binky should marry some one with money. Everybody had united to establish it; his uncle and his aunt, his cousins Clementine and Monica, his mother and his brothers, and having established it, they all lived on the strength of it. On the strength of it, the duke went to Monte Carlo every winter, and on the same principle Clem and Monica were allowed to amuse themselves with artists, and remain single, while Binky's younger brothers settled down with sweet young brides on nothing at all. I was vital to them, absolutely vital. Without me the dear duke could not have been permitted to lose his hundreds at the tables, without me Clem could never have had her futurist bedroom or Monica her penniless sweethearts. The girls talked about me ages before, as though I actually were in the flesh, and they sized me up pretty well in prospect. They felt certain I wouldn't be ugly and that I would be young, and the betting was that I would be an American, for they knew he would marry no one with or without money who wasn't nice-looking, and they knew, so they said, that no older beauty would be taken in by him, and they felt, like every one else, that there were more pretty

heiresses with appetites for titles in the United States than in Australia.

Yes. His meeting with me was one of those happy turns of circumstance, when head and heart and the wishes of one's relations are all in perfect accord. He did not analyse his feelings or question his own motives, nor any one else's for that matter. Analysis is not in his line. Obviously, fate had thrown this jolly little heiress in his way. I am perfectly certain that he thought of me as a jolly little heiress, in spite of my longness and my sombre eyes, and my general effect of mingled languor and fierceness. The term would have nothing in it descriptive of me, but would express somehow, satisfactorily to himself, his attitude towards me. There was doubtless, something miraculous about my appearance on the scene. It looked as though it had been arranged by Providence expressly for him, but, then, so many things had been so arranged, why not this too? It was no good suspecting the motives of fortune any more than fighting the decrees of fate.

If old Hobbes could have been persuaded to divorce his wife, that is, if he, Binky, had had enough money to make that proposition then, undoubtedly, he would have married Claire. He might have had it all fixed up before he found himself heir to the duke, for it was in the middle of their six years' love affair that his cousin Bertie was killed.

The difficulty had always been financial. He had only four hundred a year over his pay. I supposed they agreed that it wasn't worth it. She had a concise way of valuing things. Undoubtedly they understood each other perfectly, and when his cousin died then only one thing remained to be done: to find me.

I say, they understood each other, but I don't mean that Binky ever understood the workings of Claire's mind or heart. It was certainly a part of her creed that he shouldn't. She understood him, and he knew that and he believed that he had made her happy. They had enjoyed each other, with scarce a break, for nearly six years. What more could any two people want of each other! There is no doubt that Binky was well satisfied with it all.

Why not? He is not more stupid than most men. Claire Hobbes gave him exactly what he wanted and no more. It was just that restraint of hers that I find wonderful. I know Binky; I know how she must have felt sometimes, but she never let him see. She had never been given to tears or moods or emotional self-indulgence. She must have gauged accurately, at the beginning, the measure of her happiness, the measure of what he could give her. She never tricked herself into extravagant hopes. He gave her all that was in him to give, that she knew, and she never tried to make him into something that he was not. Perhaps the fact that she had kept him for six years all her own, as far as women were concerned, was all she asked of life. I can see her calmly and definitely bargaining with fate: she on her side was never to let on that she wanted anything more than his even light-hearted attention and half-humorous love-making; and fate was to let her hold him until the time came to give him to me. It was a part, too, of her understanding with a fate that had been good to her on the whole, that she had to be very particular about me, very fastidious in her choice of his wife.

This last obligation must have been particularly hard for her when the time came. She recognized me as the

person, at once, but what must have made her wince was that he recognized me too. His immediate response, so Molly Tripp told me, was as gall to her. Yet she drank it down without a grimace. And this was the more plucky because she was imaginative enough to foresee everything. She must lose him altogether, she would be obliged to watch him succumb gradually more and more completely to what she told Molly was my extravagant and impudent charm. Yet she decided in a few days. It was, of course, as she knew, a matter for her to decide, and neither her face nor her voice played her false when she gave him his freedom. I am sure of this, as sure as if I had been there. Their final scene as lovers was as terse as most of their conversations. She did not even indulge herself in making clear that this was really the end. He would find that out soon enough. She let him go to Bombay without any final flare of passion, without any of that solacing fire which might have assuaged her pain. He just went; happily and vaguely, not foreseeing anything.

Molly meet her driving back from the station, where she had seen him off. She was lashing the pony and swearing in a low, devilish voice, as Molly climbed up beside her. It seems that his immediate departure, the ardour it evidenced, had driven the whole thing home to her horribly. She didn't say much; merely remarked, with a laugh, that that little chit wasn't the kind of girl who would bore a man.

You see, we appreciate each other. She, on her side, was afraid that I should discover things in Binky that she had longed for but never found; and I — I have always felt, until quite recently, that he must have given her more than he gave me. Now, as on the terrace the

other day, we sit beside him, one on either side, and marvel distantly at one another.

In the meantime, while she was recklessly driving Molly to the gymkhana and swearing at the pony, Binky made himself comfortable in the train and calculated his debts. He would have to tell me about his debts; that was the terrible thought that disturbed his journey. What should I think about debts? Should I despise him for them? He hadn't the least idea. He was not at all sure that I should not despise him. It was so "different." My being "different" was disquieting. He owed in all about five thousand pounds. Perhaps this sum would seem to me like five shillings. He devoutly hoped so. Dash it, he didn't want my father to pay them! He only wanted me to know the worst about him. Yes, certainly he considered this the worst, in fact, the only serious thing written against him in the Book of God. He felt hot and ashamed over it, and began to wonder whether he'd have the nerve to tell me, and then some men got hold of him for bridge and he forgot it all. He forgot so successfully that he lost all his immediate cash and some more, and had to give one of the men a post-dated cheque. He arrived at the Taj Mahal with a return ticket and ten rupees in his pocket. He had never minded this sort of thing before, but he was on the point of proposing to a fortune, and he has a certain taste in superstitious values. His immediate pennilessness started him off badly with me. When he found himself face to face with his jolly little heiress, he felt embarrassed. Two or three gold pieces to jingle about in his pocket would have made all the difference.

I've no doubt he felt this when I refused him. He would curse his luck and damn the bridge he'd played

on the train. Such is the quality of Binky's mind. It's funny when you contrast his state of mind with mine, at that moment. I was certain he was full of Claire Hobbes, full of self-condemnation and cowardly passion, and violently painful deceptions. I let him go, told my father briefly that I had refused him, and then proceeded to live with this idea of him, while I grew thinner, and more and more gloomy.

My father was in the habit of leaving me alone. He did not meddle with my conduct or inquire into my dreams. We had been constantly together for four years. Our understanding did not need demonstration, and the more complete this understanding, the more impersonal became our manner to one another. We forgot that we were bound together by any ties, save those of mutual respect and enjoyment. Only in rare instances did we become suddenly aware of the incalculable depths of feeling which underlay our seemingly prosaic, pleasant intercourse.

My refusal of Binky was one of these instances. Quite obviously the affair made me ill, and my father watching me, suffered; but he said nothing. His reticence, the respect he had for the privacy of my life, was an evidence of the instinct of a father who never abused his paternity.

I should have gone mad if he had questioned me. He knew that. Probably, at first, when I told him that I had refused the man, he was glad. He did not want to lose me. Quite selfishly he must have been glad, but in the face of my misery his gladness vanished. I believe I really tried to hide my feelings. On the way to Suez I did my best to flirt with some subalterns. I played the piano every night on deck, and danced and laughed a great deal too much, but he saw through it, and I couldn't help

getting thin. I remember one night in Cairo, watching him from my balcony. He spent two or three hours in the garden, walking up and down in the scented palm-fringed night. At regular intervals his figure would appear through the trees, in the light of the hotel windows, his head bent, his hands clasped behind him. I knew he was thinking about me, and coming to understand that I wanted this man with a particular gnawing, physical pain, uncommon, perhaps, to most girls. He must have come to see, then, that I was more sensual than the traditional woman. I'm sure there was nothing ugly to him in the idea of sensuality. He believed in first love and in the physical poetry of youth. He had loved my mother suddenly and lastingly, and out of his own experience he believed.

The night was voluptuous and heavy with sweetness. The stars seemed to swoon in the amorous sky, and my heart burned. I imagined my lover beside me, and trembled at the conjured sense of his touch. I did not analyse my longing or find my feeling for him lacking in any way, but all the time, in the midst of my delirium, I had a sense of shame and humiliation; I knew that I was in love with a man who did not love me, who loved another woman and belonged to her. This I had forced myself to face as the all-important fact. I had stared at it, night and day, for a month, hoping that it would somehow wither up and destroy my infatuation. I was determined to be free of him.

And then I had a letter from him. He merely said that he'd had a nasty fall at polo a week before, had broken his left arm, and that the doctors didn't know but that something serious was the matter with his spine, so he just wanted to write, in case — to tell me that if he

was pronounced a cripple he was going to get out of this world, and I must know he cared about me more than I thought, so please not to think meanly of him. It ended up: "My dear, I don't think you understand me, or ever will; and I wonder what in blazes made you cry. I've thought a lot about it. It stumps me; but don't ever again — over me, anyway — I'm not worth it. Yours, all the same, 'Binky.'" It was a scrawl and a scrap, and it upset all that I had been trying to accomplish.

Molly Tripp added to my pain and joy. She wrote in a scattered, vivacious way, just as she talked — "Binky had come back from Bombay in the devil of a temper. Nobody could get near him with a ten-foot pole. What had I done to him? If I had refused him, well, I had a perfect right to; Binky was a dear, but rather conceited, and it would do him good to be refused something that he wanted. He was sulking, and breaking in a new pony in the maddest style. Possessed, absolutely possessed. Would certainly kill himself some day." Then later: "Had killed himself — tried to — Major Smith, the surgeon, said it might be serious. She was the only woman in the station. Claire had gone to Simla, so she, Molly, sat by him and listened to him in the evenings. She didn't know if she ought to tell, but he kept muttering my name and something about 'damn the money!'" And so the letter went on, until a third postscript, evidently a week later, announced that there was nothing seriously the matter. "He would be all right in a few weeks. He always did have the de'il's own luck!"

Scrutiny of date and postmarks revealed that his letter had missed the previous mail, so he was safe, and the

world was standing on its head. I sat on the terrace of Shepherd's Hotel gazing with beaming eyes at an Arab, who expected every minute that I should buy the spangled scarf he dangled before my seemingly entranced vision.

It seemed after all that he did care, some, anyway.

How was I to know that Molly had lent herself to the conspiracy? I'm not, of course, certain, even now, but I suspect. Molly, you see, wanted Binky to marry me. She thought it was time he did his duty by society and the old duke. I suspect that she edited Binky's ravings a bit. If my name was on Binky's lips once in his delirium, Claire's must have been there a dozen times. Claire had been harsh with him when he came back from Bombay, and had gone off to Simla. Binky must have found out then, for the first time, that he had lost her for good. He had fallen between two stools, and the odds are that he felt her snub the most. Poor Binky!

As for me, if it seems that I was lifted out of drowning depths upon a straw, it must be remembered that I wanted to be lifted.

CHAPTER FIVE

BINKY had heavy reinforcements in London. He didn't need them; I had already been defeated in Cairo by those letters; but he didn't, of course, know this, so he turned them all on, or brought them all up, whatever the term is. I don't mean to say that he deliberately and carefully attacked me through my vanity. It looked, I admit, as though he had reasoned it all out, just how being presented by the duchess and fussed over by a lot of lords and generals and smiled on by the king would affect my giddy American head, but Binky isn't clever enough for that. He must have just quite simply set himself to giving me a good time with the nice, vague hope I should find him a better sort of chap than I had at first thought him. And so he stirred them all into action for my amusement. It's funny to think of the stiff old generals and solid dowagers who danced about helping Binky to capture a poor child who was already bound and gagged by her infatuation. I suppose it did seem flattering. I suppose I must have enjoyed it. It was a kind of antidote to that other humiliation.

There was firstly his family, made up of his uncle the duke, and his aunt, his cousins, and their scenery; and then there were all their friends, with, again, their scenery. I mean by scenery their titles and coronets and histories, as well as the more or less wonderful houses they lived in and the moors and deer forests they tried to hold on

to, and the great array of elaborate sports and amusements they went in for. There were so many castles, such endless family portraits, such yards of pearls, and in the centre of it all was the duke himself, the most deadly of all the weapons aimed against me. If there had been nothing else, I could never have resisted the duke. When he waved his hand in the direction of all those turrets, indicating somehow without a word that he was gracefully, and with perfect delicacy, giving them to me, I was lost. I mean I should have been lost then, if I had not been before. He was so marvellous to me, so utterly marvellous. I can remember standing with him that morning at the bottom of the field by the river, and looking back at the castle, fairly choking with romantic joy. It is certainly big enough, and some of it is old enough, to delight any tourist, and if you had told me then that I should come to dislike the place intensely, I should not even have taken the trouble to laugh at you. I was too happy. I was too hopelessly under the spell of that old rake, Binky's uncle.

You must have seen his portrait by Moode, done in hunting clothes. It is the absolute embodiment of the romantic idea of an English gentleman. From the wave in his long nose, and the weary, delicate droop of his eyelids, to the heel of his boat, he is exquisite; the most beautiful thing in decadent and decrepit manhood that ever lived.

But there were others besides the duke. Not quite so fascinating, but all startlingly different from anything I had ever met. There were, for instance, Clem and Monica. Clem and Monica were the constant target for Binky's criticism and contempt, but I gathered that he admired them enormously all the same. They were in

themselves perfectly sustained denials of the actualities of existence. Therein lay their charm. They were both extremely unhealthy and ungainly, and so dowdy in their dress that I thought this, like everything else about them, was calculated, but I don't believe it was. I think it was simply that they'd no taste and no time for clothes. Monica is sallow, with sunken, flashing eyes, hollow cheeks and long neck. She almost always wears a cerise or green ribbon round her dark, untidy head, and she talks with her chin far out, like a Rossetti picture. Clem is smaller and fair, with very beautiful feet, which she always reveals unstockinged at fancy-dress balls. They are both clever, uncannily clever; and their cleverness is expended in transforming all the ordinary activities of life into elaborate and fantastic rites. Going to bed, for instance, is a simple enough thing, for me, at least. I simply tumble in, roll up into a ball, and go to sleep. Not so with Clem and Monica. Monica has a black bedroom with a red lacquer bed in the middle of it, an extremely high bed. One ascends by a flight of steps, and enters into the sombre embrace of black crêpe de chine sheets. Monica wears no nightgown. Call that simplicity if you like! On the top step she sheds her dressing gown of very moth-eaten golden satin, and lays her very beautiful body between the black sheets, and smokes little Bulgarian cigarettes until she finally drops off. Only a few chosen friends are supposed to know this. Clem's room is white, with no bed at all. She sleeps on a quilt on the floor, with a Japanese wooden pillow under her head.

You can imagine that I didn't know what to make of them — I don't know now. They were older than I, centuries older, and they received me with delicate and

subtle cordiality, and I warmed to them hopefully. I might as well have warmed to a couple of goldfish.

I often wonder whether there are any simple feelings left in them at all. I imagine their elaborated pose has become for them the most real thing on earth, that they couldn't drop it now, if they wanted to. It is impossible to picture them mated to any man, or going through any such common ordeal as having babies, though, if one could have suggested any new and eccentric way of bringing a child into the world, I'm sure they'd be charmed to try it.

I never saw them kiss their mother anywhere except on the top of the head, an attention which she received with a grimace. Aunt Cora has a sense of humour — the sort of humour that the sphinx of Egypt might develop some day. One gathered that she despised her family, and all the rest of the world. She would like to live in the country all the year round and knit socks, but the girls won't let her. They insist on the fiction that their mother is interested in art. They used to put her in her box at the Russian ballet every night, where she sat staring grimly at Chaliapine, and avenged herself by using too much rouge. She never used to go to Monte Carlo with the duke, but sent her housekeeper every year, at the proper moment, to bring him home. I wonder if I shall ever be like her! Binky, you know, had taken to going to Monte Carlo before the war.

I'm certain Aunt Cora thinks I'm a fool, and always has. She as much as says so. All the same, she's fond of me in her grim way.

Anyhow they took me to Court with them, Clem and Monica and Aunt Cora, and then to innumerable functions and dances, and house-parties and elaborate pseudo-

bohemian suppers; and introduced me to the endless artists, celebrities, and human novelties that they had gathered about them.

It was all rather dazzling, not the bohemian part, but the formal part. There were so many jewels and so many wonderful names. The mere business of getting names straight was an effort. I was American enough to feel it a little queer to address benevolent or terrible old ladies as Lady Jane, Cora, or Bridget. You can't understand, I suppose, the superstitious awe that Americans feel for titles. It is one of those senseless things that prove us so snobbish over there. I must have felt something of the same thing at first, though I had forgotten until Louise recalled it to me on that fatal visit of hers. Funnily enough, she had never been to see me here before, and it was too much for her, poor child, too much for her to carry calmly, I mean. She simply couldn't help gasping and rolling her eyes and, so to speak, smacking her lips. Doubtless she could scarcely contain within herself all the things she was going to say when she got back to Iroquois. You see, then, I liked Binky's scenery awfully, but I liked him much better than any of his trappings.

Although my father wanted to get home, I had persuaded him to take a house in London for the season. He must have known that that meant only one thing — Binky. There was some sort of financial railway tangle in America, and he ought to have been there to untie a few railroads, but he stayed. I fancy that house in Arlington Street cost him a good deal more than the rent — twenty or thirty times as much — but he evidently saw that nothing but having Binky would make me happy. And you must remember he had nothing actually

against Binky. He knew nothing of the Mrs. Hobbes affair. If he had, he would have rushed me home in a special armed cruiser if necessary. I knew that, so I told him nothing. I trembled lest he discover, for I saw that if he did discover now, I should have to fight him. I should not have given up Binky, even for him, and, of course, I didn't think much about the money difficulty. I deceived my father, not because I was afraid he'd cut me off without a penny and make me valueless to Binky, but because I wanted to avoid the agony of defying him. One can't avoid agony. One merely piles it up.

It's difficult to know what Binky would have done if my father had discovered him, and had cut me off. I think he would have committed suicide. He couldn't have married me without the money, for he'd been gambling heavily on the strength of getting me, and he couldn't have thrown me over. Yes, I'm sure he would have taken the easiest way out, and committed suicide. He tried suicide once before. That was in Paris, years ago, before I knew him, on account of the same thing — money. Binky's difficulties were always financial.

To eclipse any other image, or rather the other image in Binky's mind, that was my purpose, and I threw myself extravagantly into the business of pleasing him. I carried on the ridiculous task that I set myself on the night of that dinner when Ruffles talked so much. My idea was to season myself to his taste, and I went about it strangely enough. I began to wear jewels, pearl earrings and a chain of pearls. I never went anywhere in the daytime without three dogs, a French poodle, a borzoi, and a Great Dane. I drove a tandem in the park and rode a little mouse-coloured pony, and cultivated a lot of what I thought racy slang. It must all

have been evident to my father, and extremely painful.

I was, you see, rather a success in London; circumstances had arranged that, and I valued my success because it added to my value in Binky's eyes. I could tell, or at least I imagined, that he desired me the more because others desired me. I forgot how sweet he had been that morning, after my defeat at Ruffles' hands. I was only conscious of his pleasure in my little triumphs. There is no jealousy in Binky. He is too shallow and too sweet-natured to be jealous. It doesn't occur to him that other people may be trying to get things away from him. He's a generous creature, and very sure of himself. He felt, in those days, that I was bound to be his, and so he enjoyed watching other people amuse me. I remember him as continually standing in doorways, watching me with that bright, quizzical look, as though fearfully pleased and amused at the way I enjoyed myself. Now and then at a dance he would dash across to me, fling me a shower of little remarks, claim a waltz, and then let some one else carry me off again. His attitude piqued me.

Once, after three days' yachting, during which time he spent every afternoon down below playing bridge with three men, and the evenings too, I lost my temper. I snubbed him, to his utter amazement. He was so dejected and mystified that I grew more and more angry. He was floored, he was damned. What the devil had he done? Eventually he hit upon the happy idea that I was spoiled. That seemed to him to solve the whole mystery. Of course, I was spoiled, and being angry made me awfully pretty. He actually explained it all to me, and said my tantrums amused him. It was quite hopeless, I could never make him see. I realized that

he had at no time the vaguest conception of what was going on in my mind. Possibly, at this stage, things might have taken a different turn, my brain might even then have begun working lucidly and disastrously for his matrimonial plans, had not something happened on the Indian frontier, something in the way of an Afghan raid.

All at once Binky was a changed man. You could fairly see him sniffing up the smell of powder five thousand miles distant. He was mad to be off, and under the pressure of this excitement, he burst in on me one evening.

Would I marry him? Would I promise? God, I must promise! If he couldn't come back for me, would I come out to India? He adored me. He did so awfully want me, for ever and ever, all for himself.

He took me suddenly in his arms, crushing me, hurting my shoulders and breasts. His voice sounded broken and queer. There were tears in his eyes.

"Kiddy, dear, you mustn't think me a fool. Nobody's ever seen me like this before. I didn't want you to. I hate anybody to know what I feel. I love you! I want you dreadfully. You're so sweet, my heart, you don't know. I may seem a casual sort of beggar, but I hide lots of things — you're so awfully sweet. You must marry me!" He hid his face in my bosom and cried, and I thought of him at the head of his cavalry in the furious dust and smoke of battle, and I was satisfied. I was exalted. I believed everything he said, and saw in the break-up of his reserve, not the weak expression of a shallow emotion, but the evidence of great depths of love. So with a little shuddering murmur I gave in, and he kissed me. He pressed his careful, closed lips,

with their hard bristly moustache, tight against my mouth, and I shivered, not with the shock of this contact, but with the shiver of virginity, that curious, unreal sensation produced by vague imaginings, faint, elusive promises of mysterious experience, and the delicious super-physical appeal of a lover's personality.

CHAPTER SIX

ABOUT a fortnight before this I had heard from Jim. It's easy enough to understand that letter now. I didn't then because my eyes and ears were full of Binky, my wits taken up with the anomaly of his many attentions and his indifference. Jim's letter was a cry for help. There's no possible doubt about that. Though I paid no attention to it at the time, I kept it, and it reads obviously enough. The appeal between the lines fairly screams at you.

"Why don't you come home? Do you think we couldn't give you as good a time as those English lords? Everybody says you'll marry one of them. Aren't we good enough for you? You ought to hear Mrs. Bowers talk. It makes me tired, and it would you. She's so blamed envious of those coronets that you are kicking about — keeps lighting into Charlie for not having made enough money to buy Louise one. Come on home and show them. I keep telling them they're all daffy, that you still love the old Kentucky home, but they don't believe it. Louise says you can't be expected to care any more."

Don't you see what was happening? He was struggling for dear life against the power of the devil, and besides this, he was, poor boy, in a very awkward position. He felt, in a way, bound to me because of that interchange of kisses on the pier, and my image still

floated before him faintly attractive and disturbing. It may sound ridiculous for me to say that I know he wanted, in the depths of his heart, to be true to me and wait for me, but I know from Dick that he had actually taken passage on a Cunard liner, was on the point of coming across to me, when he got word of my engagement. You may say that he ought to have come long before. Of course he ought. He knows that, so do I, but Louise kept him. She had been getting in some deadly work on him, with her mother behind her, masking cleverly enough her attack, behind that talk about coronets. Mrs. Bowers never, I'm sure, had any wish to make an English match for Louise. She was, in the first place, too clever to let her ambitions run away with her. It was quite clear to her that Louise could never make a first-class international haul; their money wouldn't run to an Italian prince or an English duke, and a little tuppenny French count was no use. Also, she quite selfishly and humanly wanted to keep Louise at home. She wanted her to make the best possible local match, and settle down round the corner. Jim was that match. Harry Van Orden had died and had left Jim a very respectable pile of railway stock and real estate. He was, as a matter of fact, the richest young bachelor in Iroquois, and he was cutting a dash, with two or three motor-cars, a yacht and a big house, where he entertained. Mrs. Bowers was American enough to value earthly possessions very highly indeed. The actual, brand-new things that Jim possessed, and the other things that he would undoubtedly give Louise, seemed more important to this mother than a moth-eaten palace and an ancient name, which one might find by rummaging about in Europe. Mrs. Bowers's efficiency lay in the definite

limits of her imagination. Her ambitions and her energies were concentrated and sharply pointed to one end: namely, to the establishing of her daughter at the tip-top of Iroquois society.

You doubtless think of Louise as rather dull and not at all dangerous. Well, she had been transformed. Of course, it was a sham, but what of that? She had made her début that winter, and her mother had, in her marvellous maternal genius, achieved a miracle. She had made Louise suddenly appear to be the most desirable and priceless and unattainable jewel in the matrimonial market. With infinite pain she created a superstition and cast a nimbus round Louise, that made her mysterious and wonderful.

If you place a bit of glass in a velvet case, lock the case with a golden key and keep it in a shadowy cabinet, only bringing it out for display after much persuasion, and with obvious nervousness, you are pretty sure of deceiving people into thinking it a diamond. Louise was put in a velvet case, and the case was kept locked, and a peep at her was a great condescension on the part of the jailer, or the connoisseur, whichever you choose to call her shrewd little mother. Louise, having been suddenly produced from Paris, brand new, as to clothes, manners and general equipment, was introduced to Iroquois with much ceremony, after which she was allowed to go to only the most exclusive parties, was whisked away from dances in the very middle of the fun, and was every moment of the day and night chaperoned sternly and jealously — yet not too sternly. Young men were warned off, but in the very act of dismissal would catch the tail of an inviting glance. Mrs. Bowers knew just how forbidding to be, and just how

cordial. I have a picture of Louise being waved distractingly in the face of the manhood of Iroquois, waved like a flag and then suddenly withdrawn.

The secret of half-revelation was well understood by Mrs. Bowers. Louise's clothes were marvels of allurement. They were cut out and slit up in the most alarming manner, and yet somehow, in them, she was taught how to behave so that the effect was that of an angel or a very young goddess, decked out unknowingly in the enticing garments of a demi-mondaine. Yes, she must have looked quite like a very modish angel, about this time. Her stupidity gave her an air of the most charming innocence, and her very blue eyes were to the young men of Iroquois, I've no doubt, like heaven itself. All her energy was conserved for the business of attracting, an occupation which she pursued with unfeigned enthusiasm. She was kept in bed until noon every day, and there was on her round cheeks the bloom of perfect health. She had no need to fatigue her brain, because she had been taught by her mother exactly what to think and say and do, on every occasion. She knew just whom to snub and how to do it, just what books to skim, and how to discuss them gracefully. So finished was her education that she pretended an extreme devotion to independence of thought and sincerity of speech; and the way she energetically nodded her head and emphasized the little parrot words learned from her mother's lips was most fetching in its sincerity. Enthusiasm was her note, graceful, graded enthusiasm that found expression in dancing eyes, laughing lips, endless untired gestures, and little screams and gasps and oh's and ah's of appreciation and delight. I repeat, this enthusiasm was not feigned. It was natural, a precious spring, having

its source in perfect health, carefully guarded by her mother. To the end of her life Louise neither smoked, drank any kind of wine, or even tea or coffee. She drank milk and ate fruit, and she would have outlasted us all. You only had to look at the bushy vigour of her hair. I mean her cheeks would have been the last to wither, and her teeth the last to decay. A perfect physique, no bad habits, and a complete set of attitudes, supplied ready-made, to save her from the problems of existence, these would have kept her for years just as she was.

Of course, as she did not grow any older or more human in the ten years of her marriage, she was not at the end of them as effective as she used to be. The airs and graces of a débutante don't go down so well in a married woman of thirty, but it's not difficult to see how she landed Jim, she and her mother together. Anyhow, she did land him. He was already, as I say, struggling in the net when he wrote me that letter, and soon after my wedding he took her yachting, and at the end of the trip they were engaged.

When I say that this letter was a cry for help, I don't mean that they made him marry her against his will, or that he wasn't, as a matter of fact, madly infatuated with her by the time the summer was over. He was. I don't wish to minimize his terribly intense desire for her; it's just that that makes it so pathetic. You've no idea how sensitive and vulnerable he was. He was a hot-headed idealist, absurdly susceptible to the romance of sex. He was incorrigible and fatal.

He was, at the same moment, on fire with hope, and convulsed with cynical merriment, and enraged at his predicament. He felt it coming, and he was ashamed.

He knew at that crucial stage that he was going to plunge into a lying heaven, and he knew, too, that some day he would come out of it disillusioned, and he wrote to me to save him. You see, we are rather alike. I didn't answer. I was taken up with Binky, and six months later Jim was lying awake at night in a state of dementia, because Louise had put off accepting him.

They told me, Dick and Jerry, that he nearly went off his head. She refused him time after time, and each time he set his teeth and went at it again. He sent her American Beauty roses, six feet high, every Sunday, and gave her every kind of party, bought gold dishes for his table to tempt her, and fabulously expensive ponies for his stables, and his face grew whiter and whiter, and his eyes darker and deeper, and his absurd curly mouth more absurd and set with pain, until at last — the seventh time — she gave in.

It is all terribly pathetic to me, and Louise's effort at last, when it was too late, not the last pathetic part of it. She didn't care for him when she married him, that is certain. She merely gave way to the terrible flattery of his desire, and then, years after, when she began to see what he thought of her, how she had destroyed herself in his eyes, she tried to make herself over, and she couldn't. Mrs. Bowers had done her work too well. It was impossible for Louise to throw off the dead corpse that she was encased in. It was so impossible that I never even gave her credit for trying. She had reiterated so many lying times her love of sincerity, that at length, on that last ghastly occasion when they were here, and when she was really in despair, I couldn't believe.

I have all my life failed to believe at the crucial mo-

ment. I might have saved them both that night two years ago had I believed her, instead of being put off by her disgusting antics with Britton in the drawing-room. I might have saved us all ages before, if I had only stopped, on the bidding of that exquisite impulse, when I got Jim's letter, but I didn't. I stifled it and, as I say, turned to greet Binky's satisfied countenance. I remember looking him up and down as he stood in the doorway, and definitely giving in to the attraction of his wide, slack shoulders, the delightful cavity under his waistcoat, and the poise of his long, narrow hips. Certainly I can't blame Jim for giving in to Louise's charm.

I made up my mind, when Binky came to me, to be married at once and go out with him to India, and I carried my point, though it meant sailing in the monsoon, and leaving my father to go back to America alone. I had scarce a qualm about my father, and no desire whatever to go back to Iroquois, and be married in the midst of my family and friends.

I was incredibly happy. Every doubt had vanished. I forgot that I had deceived my father about Binky, or that Binky had ever, at the beginning, deceived me. Nothing unpleasant seemed to me of any importance, and all the smallest pleasantries were great and glorious. Everything had to be done in a fortnight, trousseau, legal business, everything. Jerry and Bud arrived from different Continents, and professed themselves satisfied with their new brother-in-law; but I wouldn't have cared if they had been disgusted. Binky was certainly very charming during those days. His worries, too, were at an end. Nevermore would he be hard-up; and so he could afford to be merry. Doubtless a wave of gratitude toward

me, made him think himself more than a little in love; or rather, I believe he really did begin to care for me then, out of gratitude. In the short interval between our engagement and wedding, he talked more to me than ever before, talked exultingly and happily. It was agreed that he was not to stop soldiering, under any circumstances, under any circumstances meaning however much money my father settled on us. He was ambitious. He wanted to get to the top, though just what the top was I couldn't make out. He would fling about the room among the litter of wedding presents, throwing out his remarks in that jerky way of his. "You and I can do anything, my dear. Anything. I've had good luck some ways, but awful bad luck in others. In East Africa, that swine, my Colonel — he did his best to keep me from getting a V.C. I'll score him off yet. In active service I can show what I'm worth. My men like me — I don't say much — but they like me. Old Bradford, he's a good fella, he'll get me a staff appointment, if I want it, but I think it's best to stick by the regiment for a bit, or get shifted home, in the Life Guards. We couldn't afford the Life Guards before, but now —— Would you like to come home, Kiddy, dear, or stay in India?" He would dive at me from across the room, kiss me and fling off again. "India's all very well if there's a chance of a show. If we do get any fighting, and I get promotion, then we might come home. What do you say? Oh, my dear, you do look sweet; you're the prettiest thing in the world! I've got my eyes on the very pony for you — and Ruffles has rather a decent hunter he wants to sell. I'm afraid you'll hate the monsoon. I feel a brute taking you out. You'll have to go to the hills — Simla — for a bit. You couldn't stand it in the plains.

Molly Tripp'll take you in! It'll only be for a month. Then you'll come down to me, unless we're ordered into Afghanistan. The old Ameer can't keep order, you see. Silly old beggar——" And so, on and on, while I watched the play of light on his face — a light so vivid on a face so beautiful that it tricked you easily enough into believing these were fine sentiments.

And wedding presents poured in, and the machinery of a wedding in English high life whirred so dizzily in my ears, sped so dazzlingly before my eyes, that I had no time to doubt, no power to think. I lived in a maze of cardboard boxes and flowers and bits of silver and bits of crystal and rare china and jewels and clothes and congratulations and strange ingratiating faces, red faces and withered faces, sharp, aristocratic faces, and beefy, bloated faces, all with more or less weighty names attached to them, all creating a chorus of sights and sounds and impressions that rose higher and higher in a crescendo of excitement that crashed at last into the thin, small note of the Bishop's voice in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, telling me that I was married.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MY delight in Binky, the rapture of that first year of marriage, seems incredible to me now. I am almost ashamed of it. I was so happy that it made me feel religious. It's a funny thing that extreme sensual pleasure should make me think about God, but it does. I was young, and the superstitious impulse to link up sensations to eternal truths, was strong in me. Binky gave me delight of my senses, therefore I thought him divine and our union sublime. Because of the taste of his lips, I took the nobility of his soul on faith. Heaven was in a sensation and eternity in the contact of bodies. Our happiness was, I literally believed, eternal. And God, whom I had hated and denied, appeared to me again. When I opened my arms to my husband, my heart was lifted up in prayer. That's a Biblical phrase, but it expresses the exaltation that I felt.

It is all very curious. The process by which girls grow into women, and women grow old, is very curious. It is a process of tearing to pieces and violently putting together. My enjoyment of Binky did not begin with the day of our wedding. It took weeks of confusion and horror and revulsion. I remember on the ship, going out to India, contemplating suicide; I remember being frantic with terror and disgust. Everything seemed dislocated. Binky himself was two distinct

people, an adored idol and an instrument of torture. I was a bundle of aching fragments. It was like being torn limb from limb, and then being put together on an entirely new plan. Gradually, however, things did fit together and heal up. The romantic lover and the actual husband became one, and my soul and body became one. That is to me the complete moment in a woman's life, the moment when dreams and reality are reconciled, when the delights of sense seem to hold an infinite spiritual meaning. If one could only hold on to that! I believe one might. I believe some people do. It is only necessary to be loyal and fine and true to oneself — that's all. To have, in the act of sex, one's mind beautifully involved, and one's imagination illumined, that is the hope of all romantic people. I refuse to admit that it is impossible. For me it was true — until — well, until I found Binky out. Binky wasn't what I expected — I was mistaken, but then I might not have been. I don't see why people shouldn't be happily married if they'll take the trouble to try. The trouble isn't with the marriage state, it's with the people. It's just as difficult to make a happy marriage as a perfect aeroplane. It takes infinite pains, perfectly adjusted machinery, but they are both beautiful creations. There is always in my mind the memory of my father and mother. As for me, after the first weeks of adjustment I was very happy, and absorbed in Binky.

The rest of life was meaningless. I can scarcely remember anything about it. There was no frontier show in Afghanistan after all, and I did not go to Simla with Molly Tripp. By the end of September we were settled in our new bungalow and the usual Anglo-Indian life, with its tennis-parties and its calls, its polo and dances

and dinings out, had begun, but I can scarcely remember a single person out of all the cantonment except Molly Tripp, whom I had known before, and some of Binky's fellow-officers. I went among people like a somnambulist, but the little stupid activities that busied my days held for me a certain inverted pleasure, their dulness adding to the delicious taste of my secret life. Sometimes in the mornings I went with an orderly into the bazaar, where the clamour of the crowds, the welter of harsh-colour and the pungent smells made a kind of stimulating undertone to my happiness. The glower and glare of bearded ruffians, the stare of superb, filthy women, quickened my sense of my own rich experience. I was glad of the desert and the menace of danger, glad of it all as a panorama spreading about the small shelter of Binky's arms, but I took no interest in the native city or anything else. I was profoundly egotistical in regard to the universe.

It was the unexpected sight of my husband, somewhere, that alone moved me out of my dream. The geography of the cantonment, as I remember it, is made up of a network of places where I had been with him, had come upon him unexpectedly, or had left him. There are patches of tennis-court that were a green table for his figure, stretches of white road down which I used to see him riding, shadowed doorways and festooned verandahs that framed his head and shoulders, parade-grounds that diminished him to a galloping speck; that was all. I have no memory of the place other than this, and, likewise, no person dwells in my mind, except as a foil to him.

Only my bungalow, and in the bungalow, particularly my bedroom, remains a memory vivid, and complete for

ever, in every detail. I have only to shut my eyes to recall the exact line of the whitewashed wall cut by the cretonne curtains, the sagging surface of the large white iron bed, the chair on which he flung the dressing-gown. The ugly brown doors that led off on either side to our dressing-rooms were to me emblematic portals. Through the right-hand door I used to emerge in my dressing-gown and slip into bed. Through the left-hand door he came to me in his striped pyjamas, and through it he would vanish again in the morning to bathe, while I lay staring at its streaked face covered with blistered paint, behind which I heard the water splashing. His garments, his shaving-soap, his uniforms and swords and spurs, the table at which we breakfasted, the array of bottles that held his drinks, the aroma of his favourite drink, vermouth, the dogs that climbed over him of an evening by the fire, the smell of his stables where he spent much of his time with his ponies, the warm light from the lamp on his desk that fell on his ruddy, knit forehead, the bugle call from the barracks that woke me in the morning with a clear shock of knowledge, these were to me the only realities. The social life of the station, its flirtations, its jealousies and scandals and ambitions, fled past me in a blur, as a landscape past the windows of a train.

I suppose we must have had difficulties during the winter, I suppose Binky surprised me now and then by his philosophy of the expedient, but I did not suspect that he was going to disappoint me in any fundamental way, until that night when I told him about Archie, who was to be his son, and who at this present moment is doing circus-tricks with his pony in the south pasture. Any pastime that affords special opportunities for break-

ing one's neck, is as attractive to Archie as to his father. I can see him from my window. He is trying to stand on his hands on the pony's bare back. Now he has fallen off. The field is soft! He will come in extremely muddy, with some black and blue spots, and after a bath, Ruffles, who is home on leave, will egg him on to greater exploits. His ambition is to play polo as well as Ruffles — Ruffles is his idol.

I was very uncomfortable before Archie was born, uncomfortable and lonely. It seemed very difficult, somehow, to tell Binky what was the matter, and as I put off telling him, I grew more and more nervous. I must have felt instinctively that he was going to fail me, possibly hurt me. Nature, however, was interfering with my pleasure in him, and finally I began to feel so ill that I couldn't bear him near me, so I was forced to tell him.

It was a hot night, towards the end of March. He had been to a regimental dinner in honour of the Cavalry General, and came home late, very happy, full of anecdotes and chuckles. He was evidently very much pleased because the General had singled him out.

"I've asked him here tomorrow, my dear. He wants to see you — sent his respects."

I was in bed, and I sat up abruptly. I didn't like the Cavalry General at all, and I said so.

"He's a beast! I know. Any man that would shove his wife and five children down into the plains in the hot weather just so that she'll be driven mad with loneliness and amuse herself, and then divorce her ——" I was mixed in my speech, but definite enough as to my meaning. "Really, Binky, I can't see how you can stick up for him. It was a put-up job, so that he could marry

again — you know it. I hate him! How could you think I'd entertain him again?"

Binky raised his eyebrows, shrugged his shoulders, lit a cigarette.

"You see, my dear, personal feeling has nothing to do with it. I admit he acted rather like a swine. All the same, as long as I am here he's got me in the hollow of his hand. You want me to get on, I s'pose?" He came across to the bed and bent down to kiss me. I turned away my head. I was feeling nauseated, anyway, and my mind was full of something else, something wonderful and portentous, that made this business utterly disgusting.

Binky was slightly annoyed at my refusing to kiss him. He flung back to his stand at the foot of the bed. "You don't mind bein' nice to a low-down beggar, a down and outer that you don't like; why do you mind being nice to some one on top? It's perverted snobbery." That was clever of him, and I was too tired to argue. I flung myself back on the pillows.

"Oh, very well. I'll give him lunch."

He began to chuckle. "Henry was most amusing tonight. He was just drunk enough." I groaned. Had he never talked like this before, or had I never heard?

"Why on earth did Molly ever marry Henry?" I brought out.

"Because she thought he was going to get on."

"Why does she stand it now?"

"Well, you see, she's no money; she can't very well leave him, poor old dear!"

"She ought to leave him. It's horrible the way he insults her. She ought to leave him for the good of her own soul."

At this he burst out laughing. He dashed at me with absurd caresses. "My funny kiddy! You do say the strangest things! The first thing you know you'll be leaving me for the good of your soul." He was highly amused, and his laughing kisses nearly strangled me. Finally he disappeared into his dressing-room and I lay quaking in a panic. For one moment I imagined he might be angry when he heard. He might even hit me; and then I laughed miserably at my own hysteria. He came out still laughing and something in his laugh told me what was to follow and I realized that he had been drinking more than usual. For the first time his drinking and his amorous moods seemed connected. I felt unusually ill and wanted to escape his embrace. Of a sudden there was something commonplace, even sinister in his masculinity. He blew out the light, nestled beside me, his breath hot and fast.

Quickly in a panic I spoke. "I feel ill, sick!"

"Good Lord, do you?" He lifted himself on an elbow. "What's the matter, my poor kiddy?"

"I've been feeling sick for some time."

"Dash it! It must be the hot weather. You'll have to be going to the hills." He leaned over me again. Again I cut him short.

"No, it's not the weather." I nearly choked. It was, after all, a terrible and beautiful thing I had to tell him. I put an arm around his neck and drew his head close. "I — I — I'm going to have a baby," I whispered, then waited. I had thought he might take me swiftly, protectingly in his arms, or he might be angry, or might cower, frightened, like myself, before the unspeakable mystery, but I heard from his lips a low whistle. That was all, a long outlet of breath, just such an expression

of amazement as a small boy gives vent to at the announcement that somebody else's dog has been killed, or something of that kind. There was a silence.

"So I've given you a little son, have I?" His voice was quite natural, tinged with the affectionate and frivolous raillery he often used. "I hope the little beggar doesn't kick up much of a shindy yet awhile." I could scarcely believe my ears.

"Binky, don't you care?" My consternation missed him, but the pain in my voice enlisted his sympathy.

"Of course I care, my dear; how can you think I don't? Poor little kiddy! Do you feel rottenly? I'm so sorry. You'll have to go to the hills right away." He caressed me kindly, kissed my eyes, turned over and presently went to sleep.

I told myself later that this was the right attitude, that I was sentimental and absurd, that, after all, having a baby was just having a baby, a thing that happened to everybody every day of the year. But argue as I would, I knew he had failed me in one of the crucial moments of my life.

I went to Simla, and he joined me three months later. In those three months I had travelled a long way on that strange and weary road of dread, hope, and precious discomfort, and when he came I felt nervous lest he be embarrassed by my changed appearance. I had prepared myself for that shock, but he seemed not to notice or to mind. I had never dreamed that his philosophy of life was so complete. He succeeded quite as easily in staring this fact out of existence as any other. We never alluded to it. He was kind and courteous, and the month he spent with me was a sufficiency successful, mutual pretence that nothing was strange about me,

nothing different between us. He was tired, and spent much of his time sleeping, lazing, or playing bridge. He didn't seem to want to go out without me, and I was actually grateful for that. Altogether he really behaved very well, but I perceived that the whole of this sublime adventure of mine must be my own. He would never understand anything about it.

At the end of the month he went away, and I stifled the last desperate impulse to throw myself into his arms, and demand of him something that he was withholding from me. He did not like scenes; he admired self-control; he believed in the denying of all emotional meaning. I knew this and said good-bye quite casually, and stood up in my rickshaw at the top of the Kud, watching him descend. At a turning, he lifted his fine head, waved me a kiss and left me alone, no one knows how alone.

Archie was born in October. Binky wasn't there, of course. I remember when it was all over, and I lay in bed with that little soft person in my arms, trembling with a curious new joy, that I was afraid of the thought of Binky. I was afraid of his coming; afraid that he would hurt me in my weakness. It seemed to me that if he saw me with the baby in my arms and that strange softness showing in my face, he wouldn't understand. He might make fun of my yearning over my child, or he might never notice it at all. I decided that it would be better if he didn't notice it, if he never had a chance to see it. I dreaded being exposed, in my new motherhood, to his gaze, and so I sent word to him that I was all right and that he was not to bother about coming up to Simla. I should not have kept him away, I suppose. If I had dared then to show him what I felt, it would

have been better for us both. I know so well now that his casual manner was just a disguise dictated by his taste. He was more shy of mystery than I, and he hid from it. I might have seen, if I had let him come then, but I didn't, and I imagined that all the business of maternity was unpleasant to him. I kept Archie to myself for six weeks, jealously, frantically loving him, and ashamed of the fierceness of my feeling for him, and in two months I was back again, sharing Binky's bed, and denying to myself that anything disastrous had happened, but believing it all the same. I kept Archie out of his way, and he seemed to take this as a matter of course. Occasionally he looked at him in his pram, poked a finger into his stomach and called him a "funny little tomato," but for the most part, he paid him no attention. What I wanted him to do, I don't quite know. I remember once coming home to find him wheeling the pram round the garden, and I was pleased until he began to curse the ayah, whom he had found with a cigarette, and had hurled out of the verandah by the scruff of the neck. I suppose I wanted him to be poetic about babies in general, and mine in particular, and he wasn't. He took it all as a matter of course, and instead of letting me see that motherhood had made me more wonderful in his eyes, he was merely pleased that it hadn't altered my figure.

Early the next spring the regiment was transferred and we came home, and just fourteen months after Archie's birth, Humphry was born. I knew this time just what to expect. We took a house in Queen Anne's Gate. It was a narrow house with the nurseries at the top, and I got into the habit of going up to them, as it were, secretly. Something in the manner of our relations con-

firmed me in my feeling that it wasn't considered good form to show oneself a passionate mother. Clem and Monica pitied me, and condoled with me on the nuisance of having Humphry, and professed an extravagant admiration for my courage when I said mildly that I didn't mind. They turned up gracefully, however, for the christening, seeming to take quite seriously all the elaborate fuss of godfathers and godmothers, and the formal ceremony that so tormented my poor little atom. He screamed all through it, and I was in an agony of nerves, and Binky was annoyed. It was dreadful to me that Binky should be annoyed by Humphry's crying. I was furious with them all. I wanted to grab him from the nurse and run away with him, and have him all to myself, but the nurse carried him severely out to the motor, and I was made to feel that this was not my affair at all.

One afternoon Clem and Monica climbed up to the nursery, and found me on my back on the floor with Archie climbing over my stomach and Humphry quite naked in my hands, being kissed all over. Humpy was only six months old then. He didn't appreciate the look on their faces, but I did. I remember the slight, horrified quivering on Monica's ear-rings, and the little cry that she so bravely and beautifully turned from horror into admiration. Clem turned quite pale.

After that, even in the nursery and behind closed doors, I tried to discipline my hungry hands and lips and yearning voice. Only on great occasions, when nurse was out and Binky quite safe on duty at the palace, did I allow my sons the pleasure of their favourite lullaby: "There was an old darky and his name was Uncle Ned."

CHAPTER EIGHT

IT was one of those extraordinary coincidences that make one look into them superstitiously, suspecting a special and pointed caprice of fate. I so seldom walked through the Park. I can't remember ever before having sat down in Kensington Gardens. The sunlight, the fluttering leaves and laughing children were attractive, certainly; but they had never tempted me before. It must have been the dim light and delicate gossip in Cadogan Square that, having set my nerves on edge, made the Park look inviting. I was due at various "At Homes," but it occurred to me that I might come on my own children with their attendant nurses. I had, at the sight of the balloon woman by the gate, a sudden intense desire to see them, and I left the car and walked in. It was not yet four o'clock. I could skip my dressmaker, and get to the American Embassy in plenty of time to pour out tea.

I had been lunching with Clem and Monica. That in some measure accounted for my mood. They were beginning to weary me dreadfully. And their extravagant regard for myself was the most trying part of it all. I saw myself, as I appeared to them, as fascinating as a wild she-elephant. They delighted in me as they delighted in all freaks of nature. I was their prize curiosity, their blue-ribbon sensation. This had come to me gradually, after I had groped blindly toward a warming, prosaic

affection, and had been repeatedly chilled by the draught of their surprise. What surprised them most was my liking for my husband. They constantly expected me to repudiate him, or rather to repudiate what he stood for; marriage, conjugality, the social law. Having benefited no end by my arrival on the horizon, having allowed me to become the mascot of the family, they now tempted me to avenge myself by laughing at him and them. They wanted the fun of seeing me turn on them all. In regard to Binky, they intimated that a person so capricious as myself, could not be expected to subsist on such monotonous diet as Binky served up to me. The idea of wifely fidelity was to them a quaint idea, a curiously musty, dusty idea, and that I should be true to Binky in thought as well as in deed, was bewildering. They could not reconcile such vulgarity with such temperament. They were, of course, possessed with the idea of my having a temperament. Any one who looked, and sang and danced as I did, must have a temperament. You see, they were hoodwinked by that American joke I spoke of, in the very beginning of this book, the joke of my looks.

They not only depressed me, but they intimidated me. So consistent were they, so complete, that I could find in their artificial universe not a crack large enough to receive the wedge of disbelief or scorn. I was forced to admire and to admit a reality that I longed to expose as a fake.

At luncheon they had been in great form. Their spirit of rare and perverse enjoyment gave them the advantage over my less beautiful mood. I ate lunch savagely in silence, while they talked about Joseph. That was the first time, strangely enough, that I heard of

Joseph. He had, it seemed, recited some of his poems at somebody's house the day before, and they were wild about him. I gathered that the poems were about dead white moths laying eggs, and green caterpillars crawling on decayed leaves. Monica was quite sure that he was ushering in a new art, a new school of poetry. She called him an Imagist or Vorticist or something. Clem was a little dubious about the poetry, but entirely convinced about his personality. It was a shy, fierce personality, very disturbing. Indeed, one might say that it was the only personality in London. They were going to take him up. Between the roast mutton and the rice-pudding, I was given a mental picture of the young man, his ferocious looks, his shy, wild eyes, his delicately hooked nose. He was not particularly clean, but his fingers were very nice and long. He recited the poem about the dead white moth laying eggs, in monotone, a jerky, fierce monotone.

I sniffed while eating rice-pudding. I didn't believe in the young man's genius. I didn't like his uncleanliness or his dead moths, or Aunt Cora's rice-pudding. Aunt Cora always gave one roast leg of mutton and milk pudding for lunch. I suspect very plain food was her protest against her daughters' conversation. I remember Clem with a largish plate of stewed prunes and rice in front of her, telling me that the dead white moth and its eggs was a new and wholly excellent image of the procreating universe. Clem's face was as smooth and fair as a Botticelli Madonna. Her eyes, in their shallow setting, were rather Japanese. She had on, for a dress, a piece of very old moth-eaten Persian embroidery. I remember feeling extremely lonely and opulent. I was both too well-dressed and too hungry to take an intelli-

gent interest in Joseph. When I left them in the meagre chintz-covered morning-room — chintz was another of Aunt Cora's protests — the touch of their pale lips made me shiver. Had I flung my arms about either of them, they would surely have crumbled away.

I walked hurriedly through the gardens. A sight of my own round, solid sons in their very ordinary, actual prams, would restore my balance, but they were nowhere to be seen. I spent a quarter of an hour searching for their two white caps, and then dropped into an empty chair under a wide-spreading tree. I sat and gazed over the soothing green of the grass. In the distance sheep were grazing. A light haze hung over the lake, rendering the façade of the far houses romantic and beautiful. My eyes dwelt with relief on the sheep. Thank God, there were sheep on the earth who just nibbled, nibbled, nibbled, hundreds of them, all the same absurd, grubby, round, senseless things. I took a penny from my purse and gave it to the man who came toward me with a ticket in his dirty hand. I smiled at him. He was thin and unshaven, with a kind, humorous eye and limp moustache; he comforted me, so did the sheep, and I sat happily watching him slouch away, while the voices of children playing near by sounded pleasant in my ears. I wanted to have a dozen children! There was no reason why I shouldn't — I would live with them on a farm, I meant in the country. It occurred to me that by the time I had a dozen children I should probably be a duchess, and mistress of Saracens. The thought was disconcerting. My mental picture had been of a yellow farm-house, something like my grandfather's, with chickens and pigs close at hand. It again occurred to me that Binky didn't quite fit into a yellow farm-house.

My reverie was interrupted by the sound of a woman's voice. It was a clear, metallic voice, unmistakable. Claire Hobbes was walking toward me at an averted angle. She had with her a boy of seven or eight, dressed in an Eton jacket. My eyes were suddenly riveted on the boy. A strange feeling of recognition, mingled with curiosity and terror, pulled me out of my chair.

I had not seen Mrs. Hobbes since that first visit on the Indian frontier. She had disappeared so completely that I had almost forgotten her existence. Molly Tripp had said something about her having taken a flat in Regent's Park.

I advanced and held out my hand. She swerved toward me, and a very successful smile touched her hard face, that looked more like a shark's than ever. I think she was in grey broadcloth with a close, stiff hat, but I'm not sure, my eyes were fixed on the boy. I said, "How do you do?" holding out my hand to him in turn. He shook it loosely, dropped it, and thrust both his into his pockets with an abrupt movement. He had his hat under his arm. His eyes were greenish-grey, and his face wore a brilliant, shy smile, an apologetic friendly beam. He shifted his feet awkwardly. I was conscious of an acute throbbing pain in my heart.

"My son," said Mrs. Hobbes, and her face never quivered. "He's just down for a few days. Isn't it a divine day? So glad to have met you. Remember me to your husband." She dismissed me with perfect ease, and the boy, with a charming lop-sided bow, moved off beside her. I went on ahead, automatically, in the opposite direction. At the iron railings of the walk, however, I turned. Through the sunny vista of the grass and tree-trunks and branches, I watched the two figures, the

woman's tall, stiff, severely tailored, the boy's limber and lackadaisical. He was walking in a zigzag and looking down. The slouching movement, the set of his slender little shoulders, was unmistakable. I hurried back to Alexandra Gate, almost running. I had a sensation of wanting to put my hands over my eyes and ears.

On the way home I kept repeating to myself the question: Why had Binky never told me he had a child by that woman?

My husband, I was told by the footman, had not yet come in. I remembered that he had gone with Ruffles and some others to Newmarket. It was essential, somehow, for me to see him at once. I had a furious craving to talk it all out, to get it all clear, but I had to wait three hours. We were dining at home and going out later in the evening. I changed into a tea-gown and sat down by my bedroom window and stared blindly out into St. James's Park.

In my crazy jealousy I thought that I had at least discovered one important thing. This boy explained Binky's indifference to my children. Doubtless his first child, the fruit of a passionate and illicit adventure, meant far more to him than his legitimate sons. I had visions of him visiting the child unknown to me, all through the four years of our marriage. I thought of Binky as planning for his future, of suffering silently through the inevitable separation. With a horrid clarity, I saw that he was a dear little fellow. I elaborated in self-mortifying thought upon his good looks and his probably delightful qualities. I told myself that I was an interloper. I was in an absurd state of mind. What right had I to marry Binky and come between him and these two human beings to whom he belonged? I would

stand between them no longer — I would take my own unfortunate babies to America. But then, what? What of Colonel Hobbes? He existed. He would always exist. And what in heaven was his attitude toward his wife's child? It was too much for me. I was in a white heat of anger and bewilderment, and humiliation, when Binky came in. I was so utterly wretched that I gave no sign at all.

He had had a good day, luck all round, had backed three winners. He was tired and dusty and happy.

"Dining alone? Good — I'm dead beat." He flung himself into a chair, his legs thrust far out, his head thrown back. "Jove, Mayfair was there!" He began to chuckle. "Some one came up to him — you know Constance had a daughter this morning. Well, some one came up to the duke and congratulated him. Mayfair just cocked an eye. 'Why d'you congratulate me?' ses he. 'It's not my child.' Just like that. Awfully droll chap, Mayfair!" Binky beamed, caught my look. "There, I'm sorry. I shouldn't have told you. I know you don't like our manners. Forgive me. My dear, you do look ripping in that blue." His face expressed contrition, pleading.

"I met Mrs. Hobbes in the Park, just now." His face grew blank.

"Did you?"

"She was with her son." I felt that I was being unpardonably stupid, but I couldn't help it. He got up suddenly; gave himself a fling.

"Well, my dear, I really must have a wash before dinner. You'll excuse me — I won't be long." He was off, almost at the door. He was running away. He was a coward, I thought wildly.

"Why didn't you tell me?" My voice arrested and exasperated him.

"Tell you what, my dear?" He took a pettish tone, which at that moment offended me particularly.

"Tell me that you had a son."

"Oh!" He came back, limp, astonished. He stood looking at me stupidly. His mouth worked. He half smiled, was at a loss, then suddenly pulled himself together.

"Well — really, I don't know. Why should I have told you?" Then more lucidly: "After all, it was her affair." I admitted the truth of this. "How in the world did you find out?"

"I saw."

"Good Lord! You did? How very awkward!"

"What?" I was terrified of what was coming.

"Awkward, if he looks as much like me at that. You must admit it's awkward." I was appalled.

"How long, then, is it since you've seen him?" I held my breath.

"How long? I dunno quite."

"Try to remember." He missed the sarcasm in my voice.

"Let me see — six years. He was two."

I screamed. "You haven't seen him for six years?" And the loudness of my voice shocked me. I blushed crimson as he instinctively hushed me with a raised hand, a sounded "Ssh!" and a glance at the door. I repeated my question in a low tone. "You haven't seen him for six years?"

"No — I don't think so. He was at home, you see, with her people." I waited — and so obviously with bated breath that he went on irritably under my wide

gaze. "I s'pose you think it blackguardly of me to let her have a child! God knows we didn't want it, did our best to avoid it. She used to go over the highest jumps — did all sorts of things." He looked suddenly very young and innocent. I burst out laughing, and went on laughing, hysterically. He looked injured. "Well, what else could we do?" He left it to me, helplessly. My laughter stopped as suddenly as it began.

"I don't understand you," was all I could say.

"How d'you mean, don't understand me?"

After a pause I brought out the real question.

"Didn't you want to see him, ever?"

"No. Why should I?"

I caught my breath. "Didn't you feel he was your own? Didn't you want to know how he was getting on?"

"Oh, Claire used to tell me. You see, my dear, he — well, why should I? I knew he was awfully well cared for. 'Tisn't as though he were going to be poor." He sighed as though he had exhausted the subject, and this time, when he turned away, I let him go. It was so much worse than I expected. I couldn't grasp it. Not a feeling stirred me, save bewilderment. Not for days did I deduce any meaning or come to any conclusion. Indeed, I was never lucid about it, but shortly after this I began to feel that there was something indecent in marriage. I admitted him less and less frequently to my room, until one night I lay in his arms as cold as ice, the shivering victim of a mental disgust. The next night I locked my door, and as he did not come, I kept on locking it, until at length the moment came when I heard him try the lock, and again try it, and then go

away. I lay trembling and listening. I felt so sorry and so ashamed for him that I nearly rushed to call him back — but something stronger than pity kept me still.

He never alluded to the episode, but a month later he asked me somewhat confusedly, in a roundabout way, what I meant by my retirement.

"Nothing — I just want to be alone."

"But I don't quite see. Are you angry?"

"No."

He hesitated, started to speak, checked himself, and at last came out with it.

"Have you a lover?"

"No." My coolness astonished me.

"For God's sake, then, what do you mean?"

"Nothing. I don't want to — to live like that any more."

"Why not?"

"It's impure."

"Good Lord! A man and his wife — you — you amaze me! What on earth do you mean?"

"It's indecent to me because I don't feel the way I used to." My throat ached terribly. I felt my lip twisting.

He flushed very red, and shouted at me: "Indecent! Good Lord! Indecent! How can it be indecent? What do you mean? We're married. Where's the indecency?" It was too much for him. He could only gasp. "You are the queerest — the words you use — whoever heard of a woman calling it indecent to love her husband. If you loved some one else I could understand. It isn't even as if we'd got bored with each other. We've only been married four years. What does

it mean?" He made hopeless gestures with his hands, strode about wildly, knocked something over. He was futile and ridiculous. Suddenly I burst into violent tears and ran out of the room, up the stairs, into the nursery, and buried my head in little Humpy's woollen blankets.

The nurse was greatly shocked at this.

PART THREE

CHAPTER ONE

IROQUOIS was very amusing over its new Grand Opera. Up to the year nineteen nine it had been content with a month's visit from the New York Metropolitan Opera, but in nineteen five old J. J. Jameson's daughter married Jim Armstrong and came to live on Jefferson Drive, and in five years, with her aid, Iroquois had achieved one of its dearest ambitions, its very own Grand Opera. The city very nearly burst with pride, and it did the strangest things in the effort to carry it off, and subsequently it nearly strangled to death, the Puritan part of it, over the Russian ballet. But it was happy through all these uncomfortable phases, as happy as any young country girl in a very much too expensive and too modish new frock. You can imagine a very innocent and rather vain farmer's daughter putting on a Paris frock for the first time, a Paris frock which she had paid for herself out of the money she made in new-laid eggs. That's the sort of way that Iroquois behaved. Maybe I exaggerate a little, not much. Of course, when I talk of Iroquois in this connection I refer particularly to the smart set, not to the great German community who filled the gallery and stalls and made opera pay, but to those satellites of Mrs. Armstrong who took boxes for the season rather than incur her displeasure, and in the smart set I refer particularly to the women, Mrs. Charlie Bowers with her friends, and Louise with her younger friends. These constituted

society, and these undertook to establish the legend that Iroquois was one of the world's centres of culture, and fashion.

I must separate the women from the men, because the men insisted, by the brutality of their cynicism, in being separate. While the Mrs. Charlie Bowers' set adored the opera, and the Louise Bowers Van Orden set adored it extravagantly, their husbands, consenting to pay, reserved the right to grumble and growl and sneer at the whole show. Iroquois was, of course, the finest town on earth; look at its railway-station and factory chimneys, its stockyards and its office buildings. Why the dickens did it have to go in for an Opera! Music was a bore, and they refused to be tortured. They would pay, certainly, because they could afford to pay, and because they were devoted American husbands, and because it was a part of the life-game to let women make fools of themselves, but they refused to sit through four hours of that stuff in the boxes which cost them each fifty dollars a night. They formed a conspiracy and elaborated a plan. Every blessed night they escorted their wives to their seats, adjusted wraps, proffered programs, made themselves agreeable until the overture began and the lights went down. Then, under the cover of darkness, they disappeared. A subterranean passage led from the Opera House to the Club, and to the Club they went. Two minutes before the end of the act a bell rang in the Club bar, summoning them back, so accurately timed that when the curtain descended and the lights went on again, there they were in their places applauding with genuine American enthusiasm. During the *entr'acte* they were very much in evidence; with the beginning of Act II. they disappeared again.

It was, I believe, Jim's idea. He is a cheeky philistine; quite cheeky enough to originate the scheme out of an agony of anticipated boredom. You see, Young America has not yet consented to be bored.

And Louise, I would have you know, was satisfied. She saw nothing shameful or absurd in her position. She sat complacent and bejewelled in her half-empty box, and allowed Jim to spend his time getting drunk in the Club; and so long as he and the other men whom she had previously dined were there in the interval fussing over herself and her female companions, she didn't mind. Louise can't, as a matter of fact, tell one note from another. She is almost completely tone-deaf, but she went to the Opera three times a week for the three months of the winter that I was in Iroquois, and she consistently kept up the most elaborate, detailed fiction of her appreciative enjoyment. How she picked up so much particularized information I can't imagine. Her data were extraordinary. She could rattle on about the score and the tone-qualities of this and that voice, and the dramatic technique of another, and the scenic effects of such and such an artist, without ever giving herself away the slightest bit. The only suspicious thing about all her talk was its extreme glibness. It came so fast and with such smoothness. To make it quite perfect, she ought to have affected a slight hesitation as an evidence of mental effort. It is rather pathetic, if you wish to look at it that way, to think of that stupid child, decked out in her extraordinary finery, turning a carefully-arranged face towards a volume of meaningless sound and pretending to be thrilled to the soul; while her husband was getting drunk and more drunk, and learning to despise her poor little attitudes. You see, Louise had

been to Dresden and Paris and Vienna, and she had seen kings and queens at the Opera, and women whose faces she recognized from newspapers as great personages. The Opera, as it happened, was the one place where she had, so to speak, sat down with, or at least in the same room with, Royalty, and so the Opera — an Opera — Grand Opera in general terms, seemed to her quite naturally the aristocratic thing, and the nearest thing America could get to Court. I fancy it was a pleasure to her to think, as she sat there with a truly regal chain of pearls round her throat, that queens and empresses and princesses were sitting just as she was sitting, in boxes in Opera Houses all over the world. The thought, undoubtedly, gave her an exquisite sense of doing the right thing. And she knew, as I say, just how to behave, just how to sit rather stiffly and to applaud with assumed nonchalance, and to use her fan and bow across the arena, and talk to men over the back of her chair. Oh, yes, she knew perfectly how to behave. Only once did I see her at a loss. It was during the first performance, in Iroquois, of the Russian ballet. Louise had never seen the Russian ballet. It took her by surprise; she had no attitude ready, and, poor child, her little mind, for once caught unaware, exposed to a naked fact of some beauty and great strangeness, recoiled instinctively. All the Puritan instincts of her forefathers and her grandmothers, let loose for once, rushed to the rescue.

It wasn't, of course, the real Russian ballet; Nijinsky wasn't there, or Karsavina, or any of the first-class people; but it wasn't bad at all, and I enjoyed it. I was with Louise and Sally Comstock, and somehow in the middle of it, I became conscious of an acute discomfort

somewhere round me or near me, and then gradually I realized that it emanated from Louise and Sally. I looked at them over my shoulder in the half-light. They were neither of them watching the stage, or rather, they seemed to be trying to, or trying not to, I couldn't tell which. They were casting queer little embarrassed glances round them. Louise's expression was comic. Her upper lip was pulled way down, her mouth pursed primly, while her eyes were positively rolling. She was shocked, and Sally too. I observed this with amazement. For a full moment I couldn't imagine what had shocked them. It actually didn't occur to me to connect the scene on the stage with their embarrassment. You see, they had such a very slight advantage over the dancers in the matter of clothes that it was difficult to see how they could object to the sight of those rather beautiful bodies swathed in chiffon. But still, there it was. When the ballet was over they knew not what to say. Louise's cheeks were quite crimson. And when Jim came forward announcing that he had been watching, and that "Gee, that dancer was a peach!" she glared at him like an outraged little saint. Truly, in her sudden exposure, with all those trappings of manner stripped off, she seemed incredibly young, and Jim himself, his face flushed with wine, looker rather like a drunken cherub. I felt a sudden pain at my heart as I looked at them, the sort of pain a mother feels for naughty and unhappy children.

Louise tossed her head. "I don't like it." Jim laughed. "Oh, you don't, eh? Why not? I think she's fine! I'm going to make her acquaintance." He was deliberately tormenting her. He was bragging absurdly, and he was obviously a little — just a little — befuddled.

Louise was on the point of tears, and for once stared blindly and unconsciously into the crowded theatre. For the moment she forgot absolutely what she was there for, what she had made herself into. As a clever imitation of a decadent she had ceased to exist. She was just a woman quaking with jealousy and outraged propriety. I suffered for her and with her, and for them both, and at the same time I positively envied them. They had the power to torment each other, and give each other exquisite pleasure. They had sufficient vitality to squabble, and sufficient idealism to make it up. They got on each other's nerves so dreadfully that they didn't care how they behaved in public, and yet they believed in the romance and inviolability of their own relationship. I could tell by the way they glared at each other that there was going to be a scene when they got home, a blind scene of fury over something they neither of them understood. They would fight over the sanctity of their home and the purity of their marriage without knowing it, with fierce, instinctive passion. Louise would reduce him to the dust by a display of sheer fiery virtue, and he would be ashamed of his lapse, of that look at the little dancer's body. Probably, in the car going home, she would accuse him of not loving her. She would refuse to be kissed or comforted, and she would wildly upbraid him for drinking too much, and at length he would be frightened and humbled by her intensity, and would take her in his very repentant arms, promising never to look at an actress or a dancer, or any woman under the sun, but to love only herself, for ever and ever.

I felt, as I say, very old and depraved and well-mannered, as I watched them squabbling valiantly in

that box at the Opera; and I felt jealous of their youth, for it seemed to me then that they would last out and win through. I didn't foresee what was going to happen, for I didn't realize just how stupid Louise was. At that time Jim was still more or less under the sway of her charm; and I didn't even think of his coming to hate her. You understand he never made love to me, not then or at any time. He never even played with that idea. I don't feel at all guilty toward Louise. It was none of my doing. Even if I had hated and ignored her, I couldn't have done it. Something curious, an image of God, or a pillar of fire or something, stood between us, and to the very end we looked at each other as from a great distance, across an impassable gulf. It wasn't that I felt I had to be true to Binky. I didn't; but I simply couldn't go in for an intrigue with Jim. It was impossible. We both realized, I suppose, when we began to realize things, that nothing was any good but the perfect and the final and the complete thing.

But all this about the Opera probably seems to have nothing in particular to do with Binky and me and our affairs. It has, however, because it was there, during a performance of "Le Jongleur de Notre Dame," that he saw Phyllis. She was in her box directly opposite. Her gown was of turquoise blue, cut very low, and she was, under all that glaring light, of almost unreal fairness. Whereas the outlines of other women were blurred and their colour dimmed, she shone as though there were something peculiar in the texture of her hair and skin that made it reflect light, as though she were a creature made in something harder and smoother and more transparent than flesh. Not that her surface or her outlines are hard. Nothing could be more tender and seductive

than the long, soft curve of her white bosom, or the dimples in her shoulders, but her effect at a distance was of a porcelain smoothness. Binky positively blinked when he caught sight of her. "Who is she?" he asked. "The shiny one in pale blue?"

"Oh, that's Phyllis — Mrs. Patrick O'Brien. I've told you about her. Patrick O'Brien is Mayor of Iroquois — the youngest we've ever had."

Binky made a grimace. Just what it indicated I don't know. Perhaps he remembered about Pat, the "Mick." I had probably told him the story. Pat had appeared in the back of the box, huge and red and ill-clothed, with a bulging shirt bosom. He loomed there behind her like an uncomfortable mountain. There were three other men in the box, but no women. Among the men was Tommy Dodge, fatter than ever, but small beside Pat. Tommy was being very attentive. He leaned forward and adjusted a magnificent white fur wrap over Phil's shoulders. How well I understood the significance of that white fur! Phil wriggled into it deliciously, tilted her brilliant, golden head a little and smiled dazzlingly at Tommy. I could almost hear her purr. She had at last all the soft fur wraps that her heart could desire, and her smile travelled over Tommy's placid, devoted head to her husband, the source of all comfort, and included him in its radiance. She beckoned to him with one white finger, resting an arm on the back of her chair and rubbing her chin gently along the fur. Her husband came forward, bent down to her, burst into a roar of laughter. Tommy and the other men joined. Phyllis snuggled into her white nest, dimpled and chattered, and made them laugh again.

I don't know how it is, but Phyllis, wherever she

happens to be, gives the impression of being almost too attractive and amusing. Not only is she the centre of men's attention, but the attention they give her is of an abandoned, bacchanalian character. Men are always, in her vicinity, more than usually animated and noisy. She seems to galvanize even very stodgy, well-behaved people like Tommy Dodge, into an absurd activity. There was, for instance, about that box of hers that night something different from the other boxes; something almost rowdy, but as Phil's gown was perfect, and she sat almost motionless, and the men really did nothing at all out of the way except laugh, I can only put it down to the fact that they were actually having a good time, and that no one else was.

I had an opportunity, before the lights went down, of noticing half-a-dozen inimical pairs of opera-glasses levelled in their direction. I say inimical, because I know they were levelled at Phyllis by her enemies, but I can't, of course, tell whether the way they were actually used betrayed their animosity. Levelled opera-glasses always seemed antagonistic to me. I shudder under them. Phyllis didn't shudder. She ignored them, just as she ignored everything unpleasant. Even Mrs. Charles Bowers, glittering with jet and diamonds and staring through her, could not disturb her serenity.

Of course, when I first got home, some three months before this, I was completely unaware of anything peculiar in Phil's social position. It seemed rather funny even to think about social position in Iroquois. I half expected to find Louise and Phil sitting in my father's pantry eating chocolate-cake together; certainly I expected to resume the old friendship with my two best friends. That was one thing that had tempted me across the

Atlantic. I felt lonely, and I wanted a companionship more homely and comforting than that Clem and Monica could give me. What I found was certainly a more real thing than intercourse with Clem and Monica, but it was scarcely more comforting. Phil and Louise were not on speaking terms. Louise professed to have some mysterious reason why it was absolutely impossible for her to know Mrs. Patrick O'Brien. Other people could know her if they liked, some did and some didn't, but she, Louise, had nothing whatever in common with her, and there were reasons.

Phil refused to enlighten me. I was obliged to piece things together for myself. I gathered that society was in a quandary. It didn't know what to do about the O'Briens. The mere fact that Patrick O'Brien had been a "Mick" didn't matter. It was, as a matter of fact, lost sight of, or never known, certainly not once, to my knowledge, brought up against him. So much for democracy. He was a self-made man, and a local power. He ran several newspapers and was active in politics. It was taken for granted that his politics were not more high-minded than any one else's, but he was a good enough sort of chap all the same, and he was, on the hearty demand of Jim Van Orden, admitted to the Club. When I heard this, I began to suspect the reasons for Louise's attitude. Jim was not the only husband who had insisted on his wife asking the O'Briens to dinner. Whether the men were just flatly infatuated with Mrs. O'Brien, or had delicate financial dealings with O'Brien himself, I couldn't make out, but I imagined it was a little of both. Anyhow, I remember one Opera night when Jim deliberately spent two entire *entr'actes* in the O'Briens' box, because Louise had neglected to

include them in a dinner-dance, and Louise finally went home alone at the end of the third act.

It was all very absurd. I can only explain the attitude of the wives in the crudest terms. Mrs. Patrick O'Brien was the prettiest woman in Iroquois, and they were all jealous. She had never made her début so they could quite easily consider her an outsider. She had married a politician, and politics was only beginning to be decently interesting in New York and Philadelphia, and not at all so in Iroquois. They were rich, but not too rich to be ignored as long as Mrs. Armstrong would lead the way. You've no idea how crude it all was. Having sat at the same dinner-table, Phil and Louise would meet, perhaps, at the ribbon counter in Braddock's the next morning; and Louise would stare through her; that was the sort of thing.

It must have been extremely galling, and I confess I admired Phil's behaviour through it all. It was plucky and it was clever. She never tried to get back at them, and she never cringed or toadied. It seemed to amuse her. When they were rude, she laughed that little snickering chortle of hers, and she exaggerated her naturally indifferent, careless manner. Deliberately, I mean, she did things to shock them, funny little things, just to give them something to talk about. I remember one night when she dined with me, she had a bad cold, which I'm sure she pretended was a much worse cold, and much more disagreeable than it really was. She kept blowing her nose till it was crimson, and turning all her P's into B's and T's into D's. That was her kind of bravado. To spite the women who were jealous of her charms, she threw them away and dissolved into the snuffles; we were all sneezing and saying "I don-dow," before the evening

was over. I thought it very funny. Phyllis was certainly one of the people in Iroquois with a sense of humour. I have never seen any one else make Jim laugh as she did. Jim has an absurd laugh. It's not a big ha-ha, but a little tight falsetto sound that chokes and struggles and makes him weep. He screws up his face and his eyes water, and he writhes in his chair. He did that night at the Opera. It must have been very unpleasant for Louise. Her box was only three away, and the most she could do was turn her back in the direction of her husband's giggles, which she did, until at last it was too much for her, and she went home.

Jim, as a matter of fact, was never seriously infatuated with Phil, of that I feel sure, though, Heaven knows, I don't see why he was not. I'm sure I couldn't have resisted her any more than did Binky. I never blamed Binky. I saw it all coming as plainly as if I'd been a crystal-gazer; that very first night she was, as I've said before, just exactly the kind of a person for him. Together they could laugh and frivol and slide over the surface of things gracefully and beautifully, to their hearts' content; never disappointing each other, never troubled by the mysteries of existence, never frightened by the passing of time. Yes, they were perfectly fitted, and I saw it, and I threw them at each other. I don't know why. I don't think I really thought seriously at first of finding a way of escape, by giving him to her for good. Pat must have always loomed rather a big obstacle to that plan. No, I imagine it was more just out of a perverse desire to spite Iroquois society. It seemed rather fun to make Phyllis the queen of that season, for I soon saw that there was a legend about Binky, and that any one he chose would be considered

favoured of the gods. He wasn't a duke yet, but he was going to be. Mrs. Charlie Bowers never allowed Iroquois to forget that.

If I had only known how soon it was going to be, I might have behaved differently, but I didn't know, how could I? that dear, beautiful, decrepit Uncle Archie was going to relinquish his fastidious hold on life just at the precise moment when his doing so would get Binky into a fix; Binky and me too. Uncle Archie, I always knew, was a perverse creature with a taste for annoying his family, but I couldn't have foreseen that he would die just in the nick of time to tie me up for ever and ever.

CHAPTER TWO

I HAD been in Iroquois for about three months before Binky arrived. He followed me with some idea of "making-up" what he thought was a quarrel, or of at least clearing up a misunderstanding. Poor boy! The misunderstanding was all on his side. He would never, I'm sure, have been made to see that this wasn't a case for reconciliation; that what had really happened was not at all in the nature of a quarrel. He is a natural, simple creature, and the idea in his mind was that I was displeased with him somehow, and that he must try awfully hard again to please me; that was all. That was his purpose in coming, and he actually was beginning to make love to me all over again in a timid, rather awkward way, when Phyllis caught him. I saw it all plainly enough. I might have kept him off Phyllis, I suppose, just by receiving him a little differently. I couldn't. It would have been too indecent. Surely flirting with one's husband is a horrid performance, especially when —— It's very difficult to explain.

I didn't dislike Binky. I even began to like him again, quite differently, in Iroquois that winter. He seemed to me a finer product, in many ways, than the Americans. I began to see that lots of reticences and denials of his that I had believed in were due to coldness in him, were really due to fine feeling. In the midst of the

extreme domesticity of Iroquois, I began to appreciate his negations along that line.

Jim and Louise quarrelling over that Russian dancer had seemed to me rather appealing, but as the winter went on, I got tired of that sort of thing. Young married people in Iroquois gave me the impression of having risen together in a state of conjugal and amorous irritation from a double bed, and of being about to retire there again as sure as the sun went down and the lights of society went out. Husbands seemed perpetually conscious of their wives, and wives of their husbands. They caressed and squabbled continually in public; they made remarks that lit up in sudden high lights the most private corners of their households; they gave away secrets about themselves, let you into the palpitating centre of their family life. It was all rather unpleasant, and Binky, in contrast, was a great relief. He was always so perfectly and just sufficiently unaware of my existence, and he was so shocked at the way they behaved that I felt positively more drawn to him than ever before; that is, I felt drawn to him in a new way. I remember one night at Mrs. Bowers', when Louise lost her temper and called Jim "a disgusting man," and rushed out into her motor through the snow, with no cloak on. Binky simply didn't know what to make of this performance. I remember his standing to one side and looking from Jim toward the door through which Louise had disappeared, and back to Jim in blank amazement. Jim behaved very badly. He lit a cigar, turned his back on his mother-in-law and sat down. She, being a clever women, made no move at all, but the room was electric. It wasn't a large or formal dinner-party, only Tommy Dodge and one or two others and ourselves, but still — one doesn't

quite expect that sort of thing. Binky's face was comic. He, at length, looked at me, cocking an interrogatory eyebrow. I followed Louise, and sat with her in the motor until at last Jim came out with his coat and hat on, and took her home.

I began, as I say, to like Binky, in Iroquois, all over again, in a different way, only that is the point, it was quite different. He wasn't the man I'd been in love with and married. He was another. It was just as if I'd gone to church with Mr. Smith and found myself coming back with Mr. Brown. Naturally, if one had been in love with Mr. Smith one wouldn't welcome the embrace of Mr. Brown, a stranger, even if a pleasant stranger. It was like that, slightly complicated by the fact that Brown and Smith had many of the same characteristics and mannerisms, and that the man I now lived with made me sad sometimes by reminding me of the other one.

I remember the night that he arrived. I came in from somewhere to find him talking to my father, and his appearance set my nerves jumping. He looked so very English and so very attractive standing there before the fire in my father's library. Perhaps it was that Iroquois set him off well; perhaps it was that I'd forgotten how much handsomer he was than other men. He had changed into evening clothes and dined, and he was all perfect from top to toe, with that glowing sunny look on his face that I had found so wonderful at the beginning. It had reached me again and made my heart flutter. No, I wasn't impervious to his charm. I remember staring at his head with its close-cropped, greyish hair, and the slight suggestion of side whiskers that he cultivated, and I remember admitting to myself that he was

very good to look at; in fact, too good to look at; and I felt rather sick at heart. And when he came forward quickly to meet me, I was tempted — yes, temptation is the word — and the whole affair was dreadfully complicated by my father sitting there in his deep chair, watching us benevolently from under his shaggy white eyebrows. I remember shivering when I kissed Binky. I won't pretend to interpret that shiver. It was not repulsion, and yet I wouldn't have kissed him at all, except for my father watching me so happily.

One thing was perfectly clear in that moment, that I must go on deceiving my father.

I had no idea, as I say, when I went to America, of leaving Binky permanently or getting a divorce or anything of that sort. I still regarded marriage as a permanent and sacred thing, and I hadn't reasoned things out in my own special case. I had just come away, to get clear of something unpleasant, a spectre that had reared an ugly head in the house.

Those weeks after the meeting with Claire Hobbes in the Park had been very unpleasant. I must have behaved quite abominably. I grew thin and irritable. Doctors were called, and talked about a nervous breakdown. I don't know who sent for them. Binky, I suppose, or Aunt Cora. I remember Aunt Cora making grim, sarcastic remarks about nerves. She seemed to me then very inhuman and foreign, so did Monica and Clem and everybody else. They all became suddenly aliens and strangers. I wanted overwhelmingly to go home, and so, at last, in October, I went, taking the boys with me, and leaving Binky rather crestfallen and sulky, rather like a small boy who doesn't know whether he's been naughty or not.

You see, Binky is not fickle in his tastes. He is a creature of habit. He has always liked vermouth, and he will always like vermouth. He has always had a weakness for a greenish flannel suit, and he will always like greenish flannel for suits. His friendships with men are invariably mild and permanent. He never out-shoots himself or bursts into an enthusiasm that evaporates, as I do. He never has expected more of people than they have in them to give, except, possibly, in the case of Phyllis. Indeed, he expects so little, that when he gets what he wants he is not bored with it. Dissatisfaction and disillusions come from longing for the unattainable. Binky doesn't long. His crop of wild oats was meagre. Claire Hobbes satisfied him for six years. He might have been true to me for twenty.

Some people would say I ought to have sacrificed myself and my fancies to keep my husband respectable. I couldn't.

I don't suppose at first when I locked my bedroom-door, that I even thought about what Binky would do. Probably I had some vague idea of a celibate life for both of us — certainly for myself; but when I left for America I remember thinking, that now he could go back to Claire. I even deluded myself into the belief that I was doing him a service in leaving him free to go to her.

He didn't go, probably because he didn't want to. I don't know whether she had accepted Britton by that time or not. Anyway, it doubtless seemed to Binky in rather bad taste to seek her out again. It might, conceivably, have been as impossible for him to return to her as for me to resume old relations with him. I

wonder if it was like that! I shouldn't be at all surprised.

Anyhow, he sulked for a couple of months, and wrote me funny little letters about being bored, and tried to break his neck learning to manage an aeroplane, and then he just packed up and came after me. He didn't warn me that he was coming; that is, he didn't give me time to stop him, merely sent me a wire the day he sailed from Liverpool.

My feelings, when I received it, were mixed; but mostly I felt dread and fatigue. I was so tired, so very tired, and I had a great dread of the emotional effort involved in meeting him. There must have been something the matter with me physically — liver or anaemia, or something — for I'm not a naturally tired person. My father evidently was troubled about me, because he asked me twice to see a doctor, and the second time I quite lost my temper and said, "No, I won't!" very rudely, and then burst into tears. Those tears and my look, which were rather ghastly, must have started him wondering. I didn't think of it at the time, but I imagine he thought Binky had been horrid to me in some way. He never questioned me, of course, or talked about Binky, but I remember now that he looked immensely relieved when Binky's letters began to come, and positively beamed when they ended in that cablegram. It arrived at breakfast-time. We were all down for breakfast. Father and Jerry and Archie and Humpy. I had got into the habit again of coming down to breakfast, because I woke so frightfully early, and because, too, breakfast was nice. I liked pouring out my father's coffee, and tying on the boys' bibs, and talking to Jerry before he

went to the works. Those were very nice breakfasts, with their solid lamb chops and fried potatoes and pancakes and maple syrup, with the children stuffing to the bursting point, and my father half hidden behind his newspaper, handing his coffee-cup across to me, and Jerry's ugly, grinning face to look at and his American talk to listen to. My father's eyes were on me when I opened the cable. "Oh," I said, "Binky's coming — sailed yesterday." And then I looked up and found him beaming. What could I do? I couldn't say, "Oh, bother, I'm too tired!" though the words were on the tip of my tongue. It was quite obvious to me, all at once, that I must pretend, at all costs, that I was glad. Fortunately, while I was elaborating a smile with which to meet my father, the boys began pounding on the table with spoons and forks, yelling with their mouths full about Daddy and big ships, and so on; just as if they were the adored sons of a perfect father, and presently I was quite brightly talking about how nice it would be and how funny Iroquois would seem to Binky, but how much funnier Binky would seem to Iroquois.

Perhaps I ought to have told my father then. Certainly he deserved the truth, and he might have helped me. Perhaps I ought to have realized that he was bound to know some day, but I couldn't tell him. I couldn't tell him until I was much more nearly beaten than I was then.

I dreaded Binky's arrival because I was tired, and I was annoyed by being interrupted in my very lazy and leisurely enjoyment of my family. My father and Jerry and I had been having such nice evenings together, with Dick coming in to make a fourth sometimes. We played bridge or read aloud by turns, and we talked a lot about

South American railroads and Egyptian excavations and the running of newspapers and the beginning of an American national drama. In the day-time I rummaged about in the garret among old books, or took the children out for a walk along the lake, or went to a lecture in the University, or to a concert with my father. Jerry and I made, too, excursions to the west side, to visit the funny old German shops we used to frequent, and sometimes I went with him to the works, and twice we had actually been down on the farm for the week-end: once in early November when the maple trees were all crimson and gold, and once in December when the branches were bare and the air was bitter-sweet with the taste of winter.

I went to Iroquois in October, and Binky followed me just after Christmas. The Iroquois season, such as it is, was at its height. I foresaw that we should be on the run every moment. Binky was too big a prize to let slip by hostesses all agog with curiosity. I was tired at the very thought, and I was afraid. I was afraid of Binky himself, and I was afraid of that feminine curiosity. It seemed to me that I should have to elaborate a very perfect defence indeed against the eyes of Mrs. Charlie Bowers. It's an awful thing to be found out in failure and unhappiness by your neighbours. And then, there was my father. I was in for deceptions all round. I could see that, and yet it never occurred to me that Binky himself would be deceived, or how very awkward that would be.

If I had known that Binky was coming as a supplicant, I should have avoided that pitfall, but I didn't. I thought that probably at the bottom of it all was some money trouble. Our money affairs had never been put on a very definite basis, and it had occurred to me that

perhaps Binky hadn't enough to go on with when I left him. His position might have become extremely embarrassing. As long as we were happy, everything had been smooth enough. We both hated money matters. A secretary person paid all the household bills. Binky's own pay and income, about a thousand a year in all, kept him in pocket-money, and we pooled the rest in a common account; that is to say, money came from America to me, I paid it into the bank, and we both drew on it for whatever we wanted. There was enough of it, and so, as I say, as long as we were together and happy, nothing mattered.

But now that I had been in America three months, it was quite obvious that Binky's bank account must be getting low. It would be difficult in the circumstances for him to write and ask for a remittance. I ought to have made some definite arrangement with him before I left. It was a horrid muddle. I felt embarrassed. It seemed to me a difficult and disagreeable thing to hand over money to Binky now. It was too much like paying a head-footman. I felt how horrid it was for him to be dependent on me, and I determined to get my father, as soon as Binky arrived, to make him a formal settlement. I wanted to make him quite independent of me, so that he needn't be nice to me at all, and I wanted my father to do this, without suspecting my reasons for wanting it. You'll admit that the situation was a little difficult.

Because I thought Binky quite safely immersed in his monetary worries, and because I wanted my father to think me quite adequately in love, I smiled on my husband too cordially the evening of his arrival. I stifled that faint feeling that had enveloped me when I first

looked at him, and I kissed him on both cheeks and laughed a little and patted his hand, and let him talk on about his trip, as though I had been thirsting for the sound of his voice. Not until we said good-night to my father and went upstairs, did I realize what I had done.

Binky followed me into my room and stood in the doorway. I had a suite of rooms on the second floor; my own old rooms had been done up for me, and the schoolroom turned into a boudoir, and beyond this, what used to be Dick's room, had been got ready for Binky. I started to dismiss him with a tired gesture, but his face startled me. A queer deprecatory smile trembled on his mouth. His eyebrows were lifted in a questioning gaze, timid and hopeful and self-conscious. For one minute I stared at him, appalled, while the essential and eternal horror of all human relationships and the general craziness of the universe seemed to scream at me and dance before my eyes. Then I said, "You must be tired, Binky, dear! Good-night." And his face straightened and grew rigid, and he went away.

I suspect him of lying awake for a little time that night, making up his mind slowly to win his way back to me, for during the next week he was altogether delightful, and pathetically considerate. He tried so hard to be a good boy. He went down to the works with my father and lunched with Jerry, and in the afternoon went tobogganing with Arch and Humpy, bringing them both in, as happy as kings, for tea in my boudoir. It is funny to think of our all having tea together in that room, with the snow flying by the windows and the grey-green lake surging up the ice-coated beach. The children were boisterously happy, and Binky played with

them as I have never seen him play before, or since, for that matter. Sometimes I wonder if that might have been the beginning of something new and fine between Binky and me, possibly, I'm not sure. I may have made a mistake in suspecting his devotion, but I did suspect it. I couldn't get out of my head the fact that he was dependent on me for money.

It happened that just a week after Binky arrived, I had managed to talk things out satisfactorily with my father, and so when Binky came in one afternoon, quite obviously screwing himself up to a moral effort of some kind or other, I was prepared for him. I can see now that I misunderstood him. I can see now that I snubbed him, and hurt him. He began to feel about for a way of expressing himself, and I handed him an envelope making a rich man of him in his own right. I remember now his face going brick-red. I can feel now the mortification he felt then; but I didn't realize it at the time. I was suffering too much myself to think about his finer feelings. I don't mean that I rudely flung the money at him. I did it as casually and lightly as I could, but it must have been rather a slap in the face for him all the same. I remember his almost gasping for breath. I remember the queer sound of his ejaculation.

"My dear," he said, "my dear — how fearfully good of you — but what made you — what put this into your head — what ——?" Binky isn't a very articulate person at any time. He was at a loss. He gave it up; just looked at me a moment, flushing, miserably troubled, bewildered, then he gave himself a fling and came a quick step nearer.

"Joan — there's something — I'm stupid — tell me—— Can't we ——?" He made as though to hold out

his hands. I stiffened. I couldn't help it. "Can't we ——?" he repeated. His eyes sought mine, sought to fill out the deplorable lack of his speech, but I understood well enough. I understood so well that I felt terribly sorry for both of us. He came quite close, and I was obliged to draw away and speak hurriedly.

"No — no — it's impossible."

He made a vague, exasperated gesture.

"But what's it all about?"

"I don't know."

"You think I am a cad not to tell you about the boy and Claire?"

"No, not just quite that."

"What then?"

"I can't explain — but it's finished. It's different — you're different. It's impossible to go back, behind it — I mean to what was before."

There was no more said, and no more to say.

Together we stared at it — the difficult situation — but I doubt if it was clear to him as it was to me. He saw only an immediate disappointment. I saw the future, and as I watched him pocket that legal envelope and turn away, I realized that the money, even now that I handed it over to him, helped to bind me, and would always help to keep me bound, to him.

CHAPTER THREE

IT'S a funny thing to think of beautiful Uncle Archibald walking gracefully toward his grave, while Binky and Phyllis, with equal grace, danced down the path of romance. It's a funny thing to think of how during those two months none of the three of them had any idea that their respective paths were going to converge suddenly, and stop short at a hole in the ground six feet long by two wide.

Phyllis had, of course, heard of Uncle Archibald, but if she thought of him, it was as an obstacle to Binky's greatness, and if by any remote chance she ever contemplated his death, it must have been with feelings of pleasant anticipation. It could never have occurred to her that his falling like that, off his horse, and hitting his slender head against a gate-post, could possibly spoil her life.

Phyllis had always been able to do whatever she wanted with men. Binky looked much more tractable than Pat, and of course he would have been entirely amenable had it not been for just that one thing. Claire Hobbes understood the situation. Phyllis didn't. Phyllis is very, very fascinating, but she isn't quite fascinating enough to bewitch Uncle Archie's ghost into letting Binky off.

I've no doubt that if Uncle Archie had lived a month longer, Phyllis would have had her way. That proves she was stronger; I mean her hold on Binky was stronger

than Claire's. Of course I helped her. I had helped her by giving Binky that legal envelope just the day before he saw her, and I was prepared to help her further by divorcing him, but even so, I must admit that, all on her own, she reduced Binky to something very much like pulp, and Claire Hobbes never did that. Claire had cared too much. Phyllis is very dangerous in her shallowness, and very safe. She can let herself go with absolutely no fear of anything in her, any primitive, wild instinct of any kind, carrying her too far. She can purr and laugh and kiss and be kissed, and caress and be caressed without any feeling whatever of insecurity. Claire looked like a cold creature, but she is at white heat, compared to Phil.

Patrick O'Brien knew this, I mean he knew that his wife was essentially chaste and cold, so he let her go her own way in perfect freedom. He trusted, not to the fineness of her character, but to the insensibility of her beautiful flesh. I suspected this from the beginning, partly, perhaps, because I knew Phyllis, but also because any one could see that her husband was close kin to a slave-driver. I don't mean to say that Phyllis was mistaken in thinking she had power over him. Of course she managed him up to a point. She managed him because he liked being managed. It amused him to trot about her, while she flicked his nose with the sharp, dainty little lash of her tongue. It amused him, and it brought him his reward. He was working, so to speak, for his dinner. When he was good she rewarded him with favours, with the particular dainties for which he had an insatiable appetite. I don't mean to suggest that this case of beauty and the beast was any more sordid than heaps of other marriages. On the contrary, Mr.

and Mrs. Pat O'Brien were rather an entertaining couple. They were both clever, both ambitious, and together they manipulated the world, laughing at its attitude toward themselves.

There was something provocative of envy as well as disapproval in the way they lived. They always seemed to be having an extraordinarily good time. One saw Phil flying up the drive in a motor piled full of men, or dining at the Saddle and Cycle Club in the same sort of company, always laughing, her eyes shining, sometimes accompanied by her husband, sometimes not, but always happy, always making her companions laugh. One saw Pat playing snow-balls with his children and a crowd of others on Sunday morning, or ice-boating on the lake, a sport too dangerous for most. They gave, too, exceptionally good dinners, followed by informal dances, that were supposed to be extremely rowdy by those who didn't go. I used to go. I admit that they were lively affairs, very hilarious and very exhausting, rowdy, if you like to call rowdy anything so delightfully breathless and full of laughter, but not horrid in any way. There was nothing depraved or bored in the way we danced. Phyllis was easily the best dancer in Iroquois. She knew every variation of every dance in the grizzly-bear, bunny-hug line, but her dancing was anything but vulgar. It had actually a kind of poetry about it, that eccentric, comic poetry that is so expressive of the vitality of America; and her partners were charged with the same thing. They were light-hearted and gay and silly; at their worst only too noisy, and degenerating toward morning into something perhaps too much like a small boy's "rough house." Women were obliged to mop the perspiration off their faces, faces that grew crimson with

exertion. Breath came in gasps. Snatches of song burst out unexpectedly and exploded in laughter. Furniture was broken sometimes. A good deal of glass was smashed. Tommy Dodge, sliding down the bannisters, once fell on his head and got himself a black eye; but it was all innocent enough, unconceivably innocent and young. Sometimes we kept it up till daylight, and cooked a sort of breakfast, or a continuation breakfast-supper, on chafing-dishes. As I remember it, we were always ravenous and greedy. I can remember, it seems to me, eating great quantities of creamed oysters and lobster Newburg and baked beans, and drinking quarts of coffee. Phyllis was very clever with a chafing-dish; she could cook almost anything. She would put an apron over her dress and go about it as she used to go about getting her father's dinner in 86, Oak Street. I remember Binky's watching her in blissful absorption, make some sort of wonderful mushroom concoction. I remember his gingerly putting in the red pepper according to her instructions, and then when it was finished I remember his amazement when he watched her eat. She ate rapidly and with all the gusto of childhood; positively shovelled things down through her delicious mouth, cleaned her plate in no time, and wrinkled up her nose at him and smacked her lips. It was a new experience for Binky. He had never seen anything like it, or like her, before.

It was incredibly fresh. You know how bored people sometimes amuse themselves in London. It was as different from that sort of thing as gathering nuts in May is from walking the streets round Leicester Square.

Binky loved these Sunday-night parties. He isn't a wonderful dancer himself, but he used to stand and watch Phyllis romping up and down her drawing-room in her inimitable style, so funny and so full of grace, with a positively idiotic delight, and he used to make me teach him new steps by the hour. I was nearly as keen on dancing in those days as Phil. Pat and I became only less expert together than Phil and Tommy, who were the wonders of Iroquois.

It makes me rather sad to think of it now. I heard of somebody who had seen Pat at Sans Souci, the other day, in New York. He has, so they tell me, lost his head over that Miriam Allys, the dancer. He was sitting at her table; goes there every night when he's in New York, I believe. It's rather too bad. I'm certain Phil had a real affection for her husband; so had I. There was something very attractive about his big laugh, his hulking form with its tremendous muscles, his storms of talk. He was a tremendous brute with a tremendous brain. Nobody knew how he had got on so fast, had made so much money, or had gained so much political influence, but the sight of him plunging down town in his very long red car, wrapped in a huge fur coat, was enough to convince anybody that he could drive straight through the Consolidated Light Company's office buildings like a battering-ram, and come out the other side unhurt, if he wanted to. I feel pretty sure that his business methods, as well as his politics, were, to say the least, rather shady. I can imagine him playing newspapers and street railroads and public offices one against the other quite unscrupulously, but, on the other hand, not meanly. Though he shovelled up and dabbled in, and levelled down and piled

up, cartloads of all kinds of muck and dirt, every day of his life, there was about him something essentially clean. Men liked him — most men — not Binky; he was rather too much for Binky to swallow. There were his neckties, which were never right somehow, though Phyllis probably chose them. They were nice enough, but he always put the wrong one on with the wrong suit, and it invariably travelled toward one of his ears. His clothes, which were almost too obviously expensive clothes, never seemed to fit. Their cut was good, but his movements were so constant and rapid that his coat and trousers and waistcoat and collars were for ever being pulled up and out in the wrong way. He had, for instance, a habit of stretching his arms suddenly straight out, and then he would forget to pull down his sleeves, and they'd stick on his biceps with the cuffs coming only to within an inch of his large, hairy, red wrists. The same with his trousers, which he was always hitching up until one could see a bit of garter and calf above a beautiful silk sock. It seemed too bad that he was so very uncomfortable in such very good clothes. It gave one a feeling of its being a waste and extravagance for him to wear anything at all, he would obviously have been so much more comfortable and unembarrassed in nothing. Of course Binky, who could look elegant in a pair of ragged cotton trousers and a celluloid collar, and to whom the wearing of clothes, however old and shabby they may be, is almost a religious rite, of course to him, Pat seemed simply a grotesque bounder. Poor Pat! His great red paws, with their wonderfully manicured finger-nails, were funny. They would have been pathetic if anything about so successful a person could be; and his walk was rather

like an elephant treading on eggs. He would come into Phil's drawing-room on tiptoe, his boots squeaking. He would lift his feet carefully, and haul one up suddenly if anything creaked, as though afraid he might go through into the cellar, or smash a baby under his foot. And Phyllis would laugh and pull him down to her and straighten his necktie and smooth his hair, and sniff at his cheek with her delicate nose to see if he had let the barber perfume him, a weakness he had of which she strongly disapproved. If he smelt of perfume, then she would send him up to wash it off, and he would go, meekly turning an enormous, ashamed back on us, and then in the hall would start upstairs with a terriffic audible bound. Binky, as I say, didn't appreciate him, but Jim always said he was a "darned nice fellow." They — Jim and Pat — played golf together sometimes, and went duck-shooting. Pat was a splendid athlete. You remember that it was on the football field, playing for Columbia, that he first came to light after his disappearance. I believe after that football game Jim, in a way, took him up, and a queer sort of friendship developed of which Louise didn't at all approve. She used to say that Pat was a very bad influence for Jim, made him drink too much and got him into dishonest business transactions. She even went so far as to tell me one day, that there was a real estate deal on, which had to do with the Red Light District — the Red Light District is made up of houses of prostitution — and that Pat had offered to help Jim make a hundred thousand out of, indirectly, the white slave traffic. She told me this when things had rather come to a head between Binky and Phyllis, and when, too, she was — though I didn't know it — beginning to

be jealous of me. I could see she was very much excited and I told her flatly I didn't believe it; but I don't know. It might have been true. I know my father once turned down a similar proposition made by old Michael O'Brien, Pat's father, when he was political boss of the Democratic party. I remember overhearing something that passed between my father and mother about it, and of her telling me afterwards, apropos of nothing, that though sometimes she was frightened at our being so rich, she was glad, so glad to know it was all clean money.

My father never said anything to me about Patrick O'Brien, and never objected to my having him in the house, so I judged that he wasn't as black as Louise painted him. It's difficult to imagine a man, really a bad lot, who enjoys life so much. Pat's face is as entertaining as Park Lane on a sunny day. It is full of light and movement, far too alive to be ugly. Indeed, his red, curly hair, his enormous, mobile features, and his unruly voice which he tries to soften, and which bursts suddenly from a small falsetto into a bass roar, makes him a most amusing creature. I can understand perfectly why Phyllis married him. I don't think she needs any justification, but if she does, it lies in his terrific hunger for her. It must be wonderful to feel yourself as delicious to a man as that. It must be wonderful and fearful and intimidating. I can quite understand Phyllis giving in to Pat; what I can't understand is her wanting to leave him for Binky; for it wasn't, you understand, altogether or even primarily her hope of stepping into Aunt Cora's shoes that allured her. It was the idea of belonging to Binky himself. I suppose he attracted her by force of contrast, and I suppose, too,

that Pat's insatiability did begin to pall. I remember her telling me that some friend of hers always made herself drunk on whiskey when she went to bed as a help through a disgusting ordeal. Phil didn't suggest that she herself ever had to resort to getting drunk, but her telling me this, in the way she did, led me to think somehow that she didn't enjoy much the sort of thing that goes on in bedrooms.

And then Binky must have seemed rather wonderful to Iroquois. He was, after all, the heir to a dukedom, and Phyllis was enough of an American to find that attractive. The little house in Oak Street and the steamy kitchen, and her father's very long, living death in the front bedroom, were still fresh in her mind. Pat, of course, had released her from these nightmares, but there must have existed still a sufficiently horrid past to make the vision of ducal castles seem a magnificent future. Phyllis is essentially a restless person. Pat had done all that he could for her; at least so it seemed to her, and she wanted a change. She is greedy, too. She gobbles up life, just as she gobbles up food. "Fun," she says, is what she wants, "fun, and still more fun." Binky, doubtless, represented to her an endless good time, and she probably gathered that the sort of fun he would give her would be of a more finished and refined kind than anything she could have with Pat. I am perfectly certain, from little remarks that she let drop, that she thought Binky a most depraved person. He must have made himself out one before her. You can't blame him! She so obviously enjoyed it when he told dreadful stories about his enormous losses at baccarat and his etherizing parties in Paris, that he had to pile it on. And then, of course, he is more depraved in his

tastes than the men she knew. Simple soul that he is, he has been touched with the peculiar deadly ailment of his class, and he has become acquainted with boredom. Genuine, unassuming boredom places a man at a great advantage. Binky fairly kinged it over Iroquois. He started a gambling club, and he taught Jim and Tommy Dodge and a lot of others how to enjoy opium, and his taste came to be considered the very last word in refined dissipation. At first, I'm sure, he was quite natural about it and unconscious, but later on, when he saw how it made Phyllis open her blue eyes and shiver, I'm sure he went on at a wilder and wilder pace, just to please her. He really behaved rather badly. It was stupid of him. I'm sure he did the young men of Iroquois more harm in two months than the Ebenezer Sprott Church could undo in a year of revivals. And it did him no good. It only made Pat hate him. It was only laying up for Phyllis a very terrible hour at the hands of her husband.

Knowing Binky as I did, I didn't realize what was going on. I didn't see the murky cloud of glory that hung over him, though I might have known if I had only remembered how he appeared to me when I first saw him. I had forgotten all that, and it never occurred to me that Pat hated him until one night at their house when Binky was playing the piano, and I caught sight of Pat's great red face scowling down on Binky's long back. Pat, of course, would be inclined to despise any man who could play the piano, but there was more in his look than contempt; there was rage and hatred, the rage of a very powerful beast against a creature too weak to be attacked. Then his eyes travelled across to mine. It was a horrid moment. All the rest were

singing and fooling about the piano. I got up and crossed to Pat where he stood in the door behind them. I think I intended to speak to him, but when I got near I couldn't. I was too frightened. His necktie was, as usual, under one ear, and his small diamond shirt-studs glinted foolishly in his vast shirt bosom, and he glared at me. I could think of nothing but one evening years and years before, when he and Phyllis and I stood at the top of Oak Street. I remembered distinctly the hole in his trousers and the dirt on his hands. I must have stood idiotically speechless in front of him for fully a minute, until he, all of a sudden, burst into a roar of laughter. It was so terribly loud that Binky stopped playing instantly, and every one looked up, startled, and stared at him, a motionless group of figures, and Pat went on laughing at them. It was like a bull bellowing at a lot of sheep.

CHAPTER FOUR

I DON'T want to be too hard on Louise, because she's dead, and because, too, I realize now that at the very last, when it was too late, she was beginning to learn something about reality. I believe she made a discovery just before she died so tragically. I believe she came directly up against her own soul after years and years of dodging it in and out of the elaborate furniture of her absurd existence. It must have been a terrible thing for her to come to grips with her own immortal self, and not the least terrible part of it must have been the discovery of how that self actually appeared to Jim. I believe that was what unhinged her. Her extremely silly behaviour during those last dreadful days at Saracens was due to nerves, and the nerves were due to the sudden visions of Heaven and Hell that had been vouchsafed to her by a capricious God. I can't explain it any other way than by saying that God behaved very badly to Louise. He let her go on in her poor little lying, attitudinising way until it was too late, and then He gave her a vision of Himself, just when the sight would unnerve her most dangerously and make her blunder most hopelessly with Jim. If He, the Omnipotent, had any idea of really bringing her to life, of making her into a new creature, and of restoring those two poor things to happiness, He should have appeared to her sooner — that's all. No — the case is black against Him. It suggests a past master in irony.

Of course God didn't have any more to do with it than Mrs. Bowers; perhaps not so much. I seem to see Mrs. Bowers squabbling with Him all the way, as to which of them should have most to say about Louise's fate. I seem to see two figures always hovering about whenever anything important happened; that is, when a baby was born or a new motor was bought or a dinner-party given; and it is the little modish figure of Mrs. Bowers that always ousts the other, the shadowy Divine one.

Perhaps you think this mention of God in connection with Louise and her mother out of place. It isn't. He existed for them, and they were afraid of Him while they professed to despise Him. They were afraid of Him and they were afraid of the devil, and they proved this by the nervous manner in which they avoided the church and the extreme energy with which they tackled moral questions. Both Louise and her mother were capable of great excitement over wickedness. Heaps and heaps of things were to them wrong. Louise had been brought up to be a good girl, and a good girl she remained to the last day of her life. I mean she avoided wickedness as she understood it; that is, she kept the law which was a remnant of the law which her Puritan forefathers had laid down. I don't suppose she ever told a lie, or ever looked upon another man to want him, or ever stole anybody's property of any kind, or did any of the obvious things that are forbidden in the Ten Commandments. Sex immorality was to her a horrible thing. This was no affectation on her part. It was inconceivable to her that any decent woman, any moderately clean and intelligent woman that is, should commit adultery. And besides not doing those things which

she ought not to do, she had a positive ideal of the things she ought to do, and she actually tried to realize it. She saw herself as a charming and faithful wife, and as a good mother. She was most particular about her child, a very severe and affectionate disciplinarian; and all her antics, which drove Jim so nearly crazy, were calculated to keep him in love with her.

I quite admit that she was a more logical person than I; I don't want to minimize her virtues, but you see this sort of religion of the right thing to do didn't make her in the least kind or generous or loving. And, personally, I can't see that being a moral person without any single generous impulse, or even any small capacity for suffering with other people; I can't see that it's any use. I sometimes think that it would have been an excellent thing for Louise to have fallen from her place as a virtuous wife and mother. If she could have had just one vital and illegitimate experience, one experience which could not be pigeon-holed in its little place in the ridiculous social scheme that was her universe, she might have been different. However, she never had such an experience. Her mother, I imagine, had made it quite impossible that she ever should have. She had snipped and clipped away at the child's mind so cleverly and consistently, that it was impossible for her ever to dream of any adventure beyond the confines of respectable luxury. I've heard of a mother who stands at her children's beds when they are asleep, and influences their character by repeating to them ideas which sink into their minds without their knowing it. Rather a mean advantage to take of them, it seems to me. I don't suppose Mrs. Bowers ever did just that, but all during the period of Louise's adolescence, when her

little mind was yet half asleep, I can hear Mrs. Bowers repeating over and over: "The great day of your life is your wedding-day. The most important thing in life is marriage. Always be certain that your husband adores you, for in this way you will make your happiness secure. Money and jewels and a nice house are far more lasting than the excitement of flirtation. You won't be able to avoid having children if you want to, so make up your mind to love them. Children will save you from boredom and give you a hold over your husband. Be sure your children adore you. Their love will save you from despair," etc., etc. And over and over again: "Always be certain that your husband adores you. Let him give you presents. Let him not have anything to do with other women. Men are queer, but pretend that he should be true to you just as he expects you to be true to him." I seem to hear Mrs. Bowers running on and on in a kind of hypnotic monotone, while she stood guard over Louise's youth. I seem to see her as a very stylish witch, a witch by Poiret, murmuring incantations over her daughter, casting a spell upon her from which she was never to free herself. It sounds absurd, but if you had seen her as I have, swooping down on them in their own ménage, positively the witch's broomstick was as visible as her hat.

Louise and Jim lived in a very expensive up-to-date flat on Jefferson Drive, just around the corner from Mrs. Bowers. Louise had a telephone by her bedside, and telephoned her mother every morning, and in the middle of the night too, for all I know. You can imagine that to a jumpy person like Jim, it might have been a cause of annoyance that even his wife's bed was exposed so actually to the presence of his mother-in-

law. There was always the danger of that telephone ringing and of that peculiar thin, smooth voice beginning to talk at the other end. I don't mean that Mrs. Bowers was ever so tactless as to ring them up in the middle of the night, or that she deliberately annoyed Jim any more than was necessary; on the contrary, she was always soothing him and purring over him, and for ever professing to take his side against Louise. The horrible part was not that she invariably backed up Louise against him, but that she was always there to take one side or the other, and there always were sides to take. Violent disputes were the usual thing in that house. Jim was, to put is mildly, an eccentric sort of person to live with. He has a very quick temper and an acute ear for the truth. Hypocrisy hits him on the raw, and when he is hit on the raw he does not behave always like a gentleman, not, for instance, like Binky. When Binky is annoyed, he laughs and turns his back. Not so with Jim. He grows purple, his teeth chatter, he grabs things in his hands and breaks them. He is terrifying because you can see that he is terrified of himself. A lot of devils seem to be let loose in him, and his effort to hold them in is painful. Usually he succeeds. I surmise this, because it alone explains Louise's stupidity. She simply never realized what was going on before her eyes, or she couldn't have persisted in annoying him so. You'd think even she, stupid as she was, might have understood those agonizing signs, might have foreseen what would one day happen, but she didn't.

On the rare occasions when he did lose control, she always found an explanation which satisfied her, and which had nothing to do with the truth. Usually she

would put it down to drink. When I picked her up off the floor behind that meagre fringe of palms, that masked her so completely from the dancers, at that dreadful fancy-dress ball in New York, the first word she whispered was champagne, and on the way back to our hotel she kept repeating: "I could never forgive him, Joan, never, if I didn't know that it was the champagne."

I tried that night to get at the truth with her, to make her see it, but it was impossible.

We were in New York together, Jim and Louise and Binky and I, staying at a hotel for a few days, and that night we had gone to a big affair, a Bal Masque. It was in the middle of it, about one o'clock, when Jim came to me. I was dancing. He caught me on the edge of the ballroom and dragged me away from my partner, whoever he was, I've forgotten.

"Louise wants you," he said curiously. "Hurry — Binky's watching her — keeping them off ——"

I found her lying on the floor in an alcove, behind some palms, and Binky standing over her helplessly, trying, I suppose, to shield her from the eyes of New York. She lay perfectly still in a pool of water. I suppose it was water, but it may have been champagne, the champagne she was always talking about.

At first, the fact that Jim had knocked her down, didn't occur to me. I'm not sure even now that he did. When he saw how terrified I was, he laughed. He laughed more disagreeably than I've ever heard him laugh.

"She's faking," was all he said.

Perhaps he struck out at her and she let herself be knocked down. I don't know. I can't tell. He must,

anyway, have hit her, or started to. It's impossible to tell how much of it all was hysteria on her part, or fake, as he called it. She, poor child, didn't know herself; but she wasn't really unconscious or even in a faint. Binky told me afterwards that she wouldn't let him lift her up till I came. When he tried to, she rolled her eyes and gave a sob and said "No — no — leave me alone," in such a loud voice, that he gave it up, afraid curious people would crowd in on them. He just stood there for those long minutes while Jim went to get me, and I suppose he suffered more than any of them in a way, thinking every second that he would be discovered with a lady soaking wet on the floor behind him.

I sent him for our coats. Hers was a long fur one, fortunately. I managed to get her on to her feet, to wrap is round her, and then the four of us went round and down a side stair and so, with Louise clinging to me, her teeth chattering, and Jim following in a fury behind, we got into our car.

Jim disappeared when we reached the hotel. I don't know where he went.

At the door of the lift he snarled to me —

"She's done it before, I tell you. It's pretending!" and then went off. Binky didn't see him again till next day.

It seems that some woman, dressed like I don't know what, had been flirting with Jim. He had danced with her, and she had hugged him with long bare arms and had kissed him, so Louise said. It's quite possible. You know what people are at these affairs, and what they will do, even quite good people and Americans at that, to the noise of a drunken rag-time. Anyhow

Louise went after them. She dragged him into that alcove and made a scene. When he laughed and said it had been nothing but horse-play, she proceeded to show him herself what the other woman had done to him. I mean that she proceeded to illustrate on him the embrace she thought so beastly — and then he knocked her down.

This is as she told it to me while I was stripping off her clothes. And then she fainted, and he threw a jug of water or something over her.

"Thank God I'm clean, anyway!" she said, while I rubbed her with a bath-towel.

I tried to explain to her how it would affect a man like Jim, or any other man for that matter, who cared about his wife's immaculateness — how it would affect him, to have her suddenly play the part of a cocotte to him, but do you suppose she could see it? No. She couldn't even see that there was anything to see.

She kept repeating that thank God she was clean, and always had been clean, and that if it weren't for his being drunk she would never forgive him.

"But what did he say, Louise, when you kissed him like that?" I urged.

"He said—'Damn you! What do you think you are?'—and knocked me down."

"Don't you see, my dear, don't you see?"

"See what? He was drunk. He knocked me down."

It was hopeless. I got her into bed and gave her a hot drink and sat by her table a little, and then went off to my room to think it over. I saw at least one thing very clearly. Jim's rage, his sudden fury, proved that he still cared for her. Poor little Louise! She still possessed something that he prized very highly.

I found Binky wandering about in my room. He was very much disturbed.

"Do they do this sort of thing much over here?" he asked.

"No. At least, I don't know. Perhaps they do. They're not all like Louise and Jim. Nobody's quite like Jim."

"I never saw any one the least like her."

"Oh, she's not unique at all!"

"But, my dear, it beats me — it absolutely beats me ——"

"What beats you?"

"She does. She's so blasted silly — she doesn't know anything! She's married. She's had a kid. She doesn't know anything ——"

"I know."

When he left me, I thought a long time about Louise's chastity. She was mother of a child and as chaste as a nun. Of course I ought to have known how it would turn out.

Mrs. Bowers had once probably told her that champagne excited a man's passions, and so she beautifully forgave Jim the next morning when he promised to be teetotal for a month, and she let him walk her up Fifth Avenue to Tiffany's and buy her an emerald that she had long coveted. When I saw the emerald, my heart sank, but Louise took me aside and kissed me, and said she was quite happy again now and certain of Jim's love for her. I just looked at her. I was speechless. It seemed to me that even if she had forgiven Jim, I could never forgive him. He had struck her, and in striking her he had struck me, and I had lain awake all night loathing him for it, and now, the next

day, Louise was quite happy in the secure possession of his love and a new emerald ring.

That afternoon Jim and I had the first, and one of the very few, conversations, which need ever have excluded his wife. He came into the sitting-room of our suite an hour before dinner. Louise, he said, was shopping. He was ill at ease. His eyes were very dark, and at times they looked ashamed, and at times they looked just as they used to look when he was a little boy in knickers. He smoked several cigarettes in silence.

"Well, what are you thinking?" he brought out at last.

"I didn't know you were that kind of a brute," I said.

He kicked a footstool. "I tell you Louise is a dog-gone idiot," he burst out. "She pretended to fall down."

"Did you hit her?" I asked.

"No, I didn't! She fell down. She's done it before. She pretends——" There was an agony in his voice — an agony of shame and anger and disgust. I thought of Louise's emerald ring and her smile. Perhaps she was pretending to me too, that she was happy. How could I tell! I felt very depressed.

"Women make me sick," muttered he, walking around the room. It is one of his favourite remarks. I didn't answer him. I merely sat looking at him. I couldn't loathe him. I had a strong desire to take him in my arms and comfort him. He was obviously suffering so much — more than any one else — and I foresaw that he was going to suffer more and always more, of that horrid pain of shame and remorse and disgust.

"Your father used to drink too much," I said, by way of relieving the tension. We both knew perfectly well

that we both knew he wasn't drunk, but I gave him something to hide behind if he wanted.

"I had only had half a bottle," he growled, and then I was very glad he didn't accept my invitation to hide. That was all I got out of that talk. I don't think we said anything more. Do you call that not playing the game by Louise? If you do then I'm guilty, and if I am guilty I only wish to God I'd got a little more out of it.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE weather had a lot to do with it. If it hadn't been for the weather there would have been no week-end at Otrago Lake. Phyllis wouldn't have fallen off the iceboat, and things with Binky wouldn't have come to a climax so soon, or perhaps ever. Uncle Archie, that is, would have had time to die before they did come to a climax, and Jim and I should never have been put in the way of meriting Louise's displeasure, for Louise would not have been snowed up in New Jersey. It is all a network of accidents hanging on a single if, but granted the if, which was the blizzard, the rest was inevitable. I mean that after the blizzard in Iroquois, which was the same blizzard that stopped the trains between New Jersey and New York, making Louise a prisoner, it was inevitable that I should think of a week-end in the country. The thermometer stood at a steady zero, presaging some days at least of frost. The air had that extraordinary clean-washed feeling following a storm. It sparkled and crackled with the electricity of the icy sunlight, and the whole world was marvellously white with snow. There would be skating and tobogganing and ice-boating if the wind had swept enough of the lake clear of snow, and the trees would be trimmed with a lace of frost and icicles, and we could keep warm inside somehow, with large enough log-fires and plenty of blankets. Granted the blizzard

then, the week-end was inevitable; granted the week-end and the ice-boating, it was inevitable that Phyllis should stand up in the bow while they were going ninety miles an hour, and should fall off. Granted that she was knocked unconscious for the moment, it was also inevitable that Binky should give himself away, and so on.

Poor Binky! He had never been on such a week-end in his life. Never in his life had he sought pleasure in such acute discomfort. When I think of that country house built of wooden shingles, with its dozens of broad windows rattling in the night wind, its wide verandahs piled high with snowdrifts and its uncarpeted floors, I wonder that I dared take Binky there. It wasn't at all the sort of thing he was used to. Binky doesn't mind roughing it when he's got to, that is, when he's with his regiment, though even on active service he manages to do himself pretty well. He went off the other day with a servant, two horses and two grooms, and about a hundred pounds of luggage above the allowed amount, most of which consists of folding baths and flat-irons for pressing clothes and food from Fortnum and Mason's.

Binky, in peace-time, likes things done in a special way. He likes his man to call him once gently at seven o'clock in the morning, then again at seven-thirty, after a doze, and finally, at eight he likes to be told firmly that his bath is ready. He likes to come in from hunting to a large tea-table by a small but pervasive coal fire. He likes to wander down to a late breakfast and eat his porridge with his head out the window, while he talks about the weather to one of the keepers or gardeners or somebody. He likes to play bridge between

midnight and three in the morning, with hot kippers and coffee between rubbers. He likes women in the house who disappear for long intervals, and who don't mind the men being out all day shooting. His perfect sixty-hour week is divided up something like this: Twenty hours with a gun; twenty hours, *i. e.*, three nights of six to seven hours each, of sleep; ten hours given over to eating and its attendant ceremonies of smoking and talking, and ten hours given to ladies, billiards, and bridge.

You can see for yourself that a mid-winter picnic at Otrago was not quite planned to suit him. He would never have stood it for a moment if he hadn't been very much in love. It is not the least of Phil's triumphs that she made that week-end seem to him not only bearable, but even an enjoyable sort of an escapade. If it hadn't been for Phyllis he would certainly have called it one of my mad freaks, and now from the solid English comfort of this place it seems to me that it was.

I wonder that I dared call it a house-party, and I wonder where the pleasure came in. We must have been possessed, for, after all, we weren't so very young; and it was far more like a polar expedition than a pleasure picnic. "Green Gables" is a nice enough house in the very hot months of summer. My father built it about twenty years ago, and on a hot day, with its red-and-white striped awnings shading the already shaded verandahs and the willows below drooping into the waters of the lake, it is quite charming; but it was not built for a winter camp. It hasn't even a furnace. We wore sweaters and furs at dinner. Our noses were blue with cold. We pulled the dining-room table almost into the

fireplace, and Phyllis and Katherine and Sally and I, sat on the fireside with the men opposite, but in spite of our scorching backs against a blazing fire of birch-logs and pine-cones, our breath made little clouds of steam, and Phyllis's fingers were so stiff she had to let Binky cut up her meat for her. This he did quite solemnly, as a kind of religious rite, and his tender, serious care over those little bits of meat destined for Phil's mouth was the more noticeable because we were so very uproarious. I don't think a dozen civilized grown people ever made so much noise. It all seemed to help keep us warm. We ate as fast as we could, and after dinner we played blind-man's-buff and leap-frog, and danced for so long at a time as Binky could manage to play the piano. I can't remember Binky ever sacrificing himself to other people's fun so patiently before. Doubtless, when Phil came to him, flushed and laughing, to rub his poor stiff hands, he was compensated. Perhaps just the sight of her romping up and down with her hair flying, her figure in its white sweater and white woollen skirt swaying, was enough for him. I confess I have never seen her look more entrancing; she seemed to sparkle and glitter.

It was on Sunday afternoon that she fell off the iceboat and cut her bright, beautiful head open, and so disastrously destroyed Binky's all but perfect and unshakable self-possession. I had contemplated Binky's self-control for five years, and except for that one instance when I refused to go on filling the rôle of complete wife to him, I had never seen it seriously shaken. I don't call his little self-indulgent bursts of temper instances of his losing poise. They were mannerisms which he allowed himself, consciously, and even

in that scene of ours, he had himself pretty well in hand. But on this occasion he was done for; left quaking and exposed, a poor suffering human, utterly self-forgetful in his panic; and I take it that this is the highest possible tribute he could ever pay to any woman, and he paid it to Phyllis. He never paid it to me, and I am certain he never paid it to Claire Hobbes. She never gave him the opportunity, I suppose. It wouldn't have been like her to fall off her horse, for instance, on the hunting-field, and frighten him into thinking she was dead; but even if she had, I doubt if he would have crumpled up over it, the way he did over Phil. There was nothing tender and helpless about Claire. If she had fallen, she would have fallen cursing her luck, and he, with the help of two or three other men, would have picked her up and poured brandy through her lips, and she would have opened her great cold eyes and smiled sarcastically at them and herself, and then he would have taken her home muttering: "My dear, you did give me a nasty shock, you know." And she would have laughed shortly with the first inflowing of vitality, and have very successfully pretended that she was not hurt. And all the time he would have been the perfect gentleman, and on the whole the chivalrous lover, just a little put out at having to miss being in at the finish. But with Phyllis it was different. Phyllis, in spite of her abundant health and incorrigible appetite, looks a tender, soft thing. In spite of her mocking lips and flippant matter-of-fact talk, her eyelashes curl appealingly, and her eyes drag out of men's hearts the sentimental desire to protect. Phil is no clinging vine. She doesn't play the part of the for-

lorn beauty. On the contrary she laughs at misfortune, is reckless of her charms, and this very habit of mind makes her personality more appealing. One marvels at any one with such skin and such dimples not wrapping them, as it were, in cotton-wool, and at any one with such eyelashes not using them for languishing purposes. Phyllis doesn't. Nevertheless, it had been given her so to play upon Binky's senses and his fancy, that she had almost completely destroyed the being whom it had taken his ancestors generations to bring to perfection. He must, weeks before that Sunday, have ceased to exist as we know him — Claire Hobbes and I — though his shell, that is, his looks and his manners and his clothes and all that inherited part of him, covered up the devastation of soul that Phil had wrought and hid from me, till that hour, the awful effect she had had. I don't blame Phyllis for enslaving him. She quite honestly believed I didn't mind. She had gone to some trouble, I remembered, to sound me, to find out whether I cared, and I believe if she had thought it would hurt me very much, she would not have pursued him and the ambitious dream he embodied for her. I had never actually talked to her about Binky, but I can quite believe that I gave her to understand "we lived apart," as the saying is. There is something very straight and sporting about Phil where her women friends are concerned. With men she is the unscrupulous, the alluring, devastating, and lying female; but with women she is honourable. Anyhow, I know she must have thought she gathered from what I didn't say, if not from what I did say, that I wanted to get rid of Binky, and so she had gone ahead with that deliberate

scientific process, so highly developed by American women and so fantastically veiled in frivolity and seeming innocence, of reducing the male to helplessness.

Pat and Jim and I and Katherine Beaumont had been tobogganing. The road from Green Gables to the village dips down a hill about a mile long. We coasted down the hill and were drawn up it again by one of the farm horses. We had been enjoying ourselves, for the air was clear as crystal, and the world very beautifully white under a dazzling sun. Pat, especially, had seemed to be in riotous spirits, and as we walked home through the grounds, at about four o'clock, with a red winter sun low behind us, touching the snow with a rosy, coppery glow, he and Jim snow-balled each other energetically, yelling and snorting and prancing about like youngsters; and then, suddenly, as we rounded a bend in the drive and emerged from behind a clump of firs, we saw the lake, and Phyllis being carried up from the shore by Tommy Dodge and Jerry, and I, at least, saw Binky staggering round them, getting in the way, wobbling in his gait and making crazy, zig-zag tracks in the snow, quite as though he had gone mad or had had a stroke that had deprived him of the control of his limbs.

The lawns of Green Gables are about fifty feet below the house. They stretch smooth and flat to the edge of the lake, rather like the lawns of some of those places on the Thames. We were, you understand, on the driveway, above the lawns, on a level with the front door of the house, and we looked down on the approaching group, mystified, for an instant, long enough for us to take in the whole smooth tablecloth of snow, and the iceboat's sail flapping by the pier, and the metallic ex-

panse of the frozen lake, and Phil's limp figure in its turquoise-blue clothes, sagging between the two men; and Binky coming on, detached from them, and behaving so strangely. I believe it was Pat who dashed down the slope first, but we all arrived pretty much together, and I remember, just as I took in the colour of Binky's face, that I stumbled into a deep drift, it must have been over a sunken flower-bed or some such hole in the lawn, and I floundered there for a minute, helplessly staring up at Binky. The colour of Binky's face was a queer yellowish-green against all that whiteness, and his mouth was working queerly, and he was trying to say things. As I picked myself up, I remember recognizing suddenly, in a flash, that I must take care of Binky, not of Phyllis; the others would do that. Pat had already gathered her in his arms by the time I had straightened up, and had leaped ahead with her, and as Binky started to stagger after him, I caught hold of his arm.

He turned on me frantically, fiercely.

"Help me," I said very distinctly. That stopped him for just the necessary second, but his eyes were silly and his mouth still working.

"She fell. She fell — off — you know — the boat — ninety miles an hour." His words were furry and indistinct. A spring seemed to have snapped inside him. All his mechanism seemed to have gone wrong. He kept moving his tongue round his lips. His eyes and his lips and his head and his hands, all moved erratically. I took his arm and guided him toward the house. He jerked and pulled and hung heavily by turns, and I hated him, and felt sorry for him, and wanted to laugh at him, and wanted to cry over him with

rage. I travelled at least ten miles on my way to the house, and I lived through ten years of chagrin and jealousy and rage, and by the time we got there, I was for the most part just sorry for him, and I was determined to cover up his feelings, which he was so pitiably displaying. Also, I was frightened, frightened at the prospect of what would happen if others saw what I saw, particularly if Pat saw.

Binky kept muttering, "she fell — God — she fell ——" and kept trying to hurry on while I dragged back. It probably took us only five minutes to reach the house, but by the time we got into the lighted hall the others had disappeared. There was no one, and nothing but a blazing fire and a tea-table set for tea. Feet were moving overhead hurriedly, chairs scraping, Pat's voice was heard shouting something, and at that sound Binky made for the stairs. I caught his coat-tails, or perhaps it was the end of his woollen muffler, something, anyhow.

"Binky," I said loudly and angrily, "sit down here. Don't be a fool!" He turned vaguely. "Don't be a fool!" I repeated. His eyelids quavered with a faint sign of intelligence. I shoved him into a chair, and poured him out a stiff peg — there was, fortunately, an array of drinks on the second table — and then I stood contemplating him as he drank it.

I stood contemplating the dream of my romantic youth, the illusion of my marriage, and the distressingly complicated problem of the future. And Binky drank the whisky meekly, and held the empty glass out for me to take. I took it, and as I took it our eyes met. His were crazy no longer. They held a perfectly lucid and honest and desperate appeal. Their expression was

different from anything I had ever seen in them before, and it renewed the ugly pain of envy in my heart. Binky had never been so real before. Nothing that had had to do with me had ever forced him to recognize the bare realities of human helplessness and loneliness and fear in the face of a threatening universe, as had this accident to Phyllis. It almost seemed as I met Binky's eyes, that I saw in them the fear of an angry God, whom he had slighted and snubbed all his life, the admission of an eternal truth which he had been trained so carefully to deny.

I couldn't be sorry for him any longer; for myself, yes, but not for him, or for Phyllis. They had something which I had been dreaming about and looking for all my life. I felt out of it. I felt that my life had been a dreamy, commonplace thing, compared to that of Binky and Phyllis. That they had only just come to know one another didn't matter. They had, it seemed to me, the whole of life and eternity together, and I envied them the whole of eternity.

In answer to his look I went upstairs, motioning to him to wait. I found Phyllis on her bead, under a heap of quilts, her eyes open, smiling faintly, and faintly gurgling with amusement over Katherine, who was rubbing her feet, and Pat, who was giving her something hot with a spoon, and Tommy Dodge, who was preparing a plaster for her forehead, and Jerry, who was blowing at the fire in the grate. I stood in the doorway and watched for one second or two, and strangely enough it dawned on me then, what was the secret of Jerry's bachelordom. He was in love with her too. They all were. I watched his back as he fussed over the fire, and I marvelled at Phil's power of absorbing men like

Jerry and Tommy Dodge, at her faculty for standing between them and other women.

"Binky," I said, "is very much upset. He feels responsible."

She turned toward me under the quilts they had piled over her, and said a little weakly, but with her usual sweet, gay flippancy:

"Tell the poor angel I'm fine." And then she gave one of her little chuckles, and opened her mouth for the spoonful of brandy her husband was holding over her. It spilled.

"Oh — Pa-atrick — it's gone in my eye," she whimpered, laughing. And I turned and went downstairs.

"She says to tell you she's fine, and she really is all right," I said to Binky.

He was sitting where I'd left him, and he leaned forward and covered his face with his hands, and presently a long shuddering breath shook him, and then another. One wouldn't quite call it crying, or sobbing. He made a tremendous effort to stop it, that queer working of his lungs, but he couldn't seem to for a moment. I turned away and stood looking into the fire, and listening to him. It seemed a very long time before he was quite quiet, then I said, without turning round:

"You must be careful of Pat." He gave a sort of grunt. "I think," I went on, after a little, "that it would be a good plan for you to go down to the village for the doctor."

"Yes, that's a good egg," he assented.

I turned then, intending to go up and suggest this, and I started to call as I turned, to Pat or some one, when I looked up and saw Pat standing at the top of

the stairs in the gallery, looking down at us. He had a cup in one hand and a spoon in the other. It was impossible to judge how long he'd been there, but he was standing perfectly still, and staring down at Binky with a curious, a very curious, look on his face, and I had the impression that he was very uncomfortably hampered by having that cup and spoon in his hands.

"Oh, Pat, I was just suggesting that Binky should go for the doctor!" I don't know what my voice sounded like.

"It's not necessary," he rejoined, calmly enough.

"It's just as well to be on the safe side," I argued. "Please let me."

"All right. Do as you like." He turned back along the gallery and went into the bedroom again, the boards creaking under him. Had he crept out on purpose, carefully silent, to watch Binky, or had we both been so intent on our thoughts as not to notice the noise of his feet?

"You'd better go round to the stables and order the sleigh yourself," I suggested.

"Right oh!" said Binky, getting up. We stood looking at one another. We said nothing. And as our eyes continued to meet, that look seemed to include many things, among them a leave-taking. It was as though I said "Good-bye" to Binky then, once and for all, as I let him out into the cold.

I realized it when he had gone. I would see him through. If I could make it possible, he should have Phyllis, he should have her soon, but whatever happened, he and I would be intimate no longer. We would meet differently and more easily than heretofore, because it was all finished, the effort, between us.

CHAPTER SIX

IT was curious, lying awake during the night, with the winter wind shaking that flimsy house and Binky in the bed next to me under his heap of blankets and rugs, staring at the ceiling, perfectly still, hour after hour. It seemed incredible that I had ever belonged to him. He was a stranger, and his presence there was an accident. The situation reminded me of some old story about two solitary travellers lost in a storm, who were shoved grotesquely into the same bedroom by a ruthless landlord. The disorder of the room and its discomfort made it seem more like a half-way house on a mountain road than like a dwelling. It was so cold, so bare, so utterly incompetent as a room. My father hadn't lived in the house for years, and this room, which had once been my mother's, all white furniture and pretty cretonne, was now denuded. We each had a camp-bed. There was an odd old dressing-table and a chest of drawers, and our bags lay open on the bare floor. Powdery snow filtered through the loose casements of the windows. Bits of tissue-paper, which had wrapped up my clothes, fluttered in the draughts that blew under the doors. I lay under two blankets and a carriage-rug and a fur coat, my feet drawn up under me to keep warm. The sheet, farther down, was chilly. I dared not stretch out or move, and the weight of my coverings was heavy. I had a ridiculous vision of being

snowed-up there for ever, with this man who wanted to get away to meet his beloved.

My maid had made a large fire in the fireplace with coal from the kitchen as well as wood. It gasped and flared in fitful draughts that came down the shallow chimney. It flung grotesque shadows on the ceiling and walls, and flickered on some old prints in oval frames, that I remembered liking very much as a child.

The passage of relentless time, which had destroyed the life of this room and turned me from a vigorous child into a futile adult, appeared to me as an embodied enemy. I perceived that experience tears one to pieces bit by bit. It seemed unfair that inanimate things should survive so much longer than human beings. The old pictures of sweet women with parted hair and children folded in their arms, would outlast all the passions and affections of our family, who had lived in that house and hung them there on the wall.

I thought of all the places on the earth where I had lived, and how they had left their marks on me, but had received none from me in return. There was my bungalow in India, inhabited now by other people as insignificant as ourselves. It gave me a despairing feeling of waste to think that I should never go back there. It was as though I had sunk large sums of money in various enterprises that had failed. All the energy I had put into the Anglo-Indian ménage, all the love I had lavished on that dwelling of my husband's, had gone. I was the poorer for it. I had nothing to show for it. The same with this room. What had become of my mother's kisses and her smiles, and the tears she had shed there? The atmosphere of it was no richer for the great number of precious hours she had spent there,

teaching us to read, healing our bruises, spending herself. The room was indifferent. It held no memories. It had become ugly, and yet it remained a useless erection, sticking up into the air, its walls protesting somewhat vainly against time and space and the wind.

Now Binky and I were there pouring into the insensible place all the bewilderment and anguish and hope and regret of our weak souls. Only the wind seemed akin to our humanity. It made a noise of whining and whistling, of spasmodic shrieking and little whimpers. I felt that the wind was talking for us who were dumb. It was full of aimless complaint and futile regret and silly apology. It threatened hysteria, and then fell into ingratiating gibberish.

At about three o'clock I got up to replenish the fire.

"My dear, let me." His voice startled me, sounding as it did just like his voice. I crawled back to bed and watched him shovel on coal. He had to fuss over the fire for some time, and he knelt there shivering in his dressing-gown with his back to me, and I thought suddenly of how courteously and with what delicacy he would take care of Phyllis. And immediately I remembered the whole of our life together, and knew that he had always shown courtesy and delicacy to me.

"There, I guess that'll last for a bit!" He climbed back into his bed. The wind took up the conversation again.

I began to hate the wind's talk. Binky's interposition had brought everything into focus prosaically. The wind no longer expressed what I was willing to feel. It interfered with my thoughts. I fastened my eyes on Binky's trousers that hung on a peg by the door. The braces hung loosely down in two irregular loops. The legs of

them dangled crooked. I wanted to be quiet, and plan what I should do, but that whining, useless lament outside kept on and on.

Would it be possible to undo my marriage and begin again? I was twenty-five years old! It seemed to me that I had enough vitality to begin the business of life again. I would live with my father. We would take up our old occupations, resume our old habits. He would provide a sufficient reason for living — even though Binky asked me to let him go, and the children as well. It was impossible to think clearly about losing Arch and Humpy. Their round, firm legs, their bushy heads, their boisterous voices, confused me. I found myself erratically wondering if they needed new clothes. They would soon be too big for tunics and knickers. In a year or two they would have to go to school. The English system demanded that they go away from me. Binky would be shocked if I implored him to let them stay at home until they were a little bigger, a little more substantial. How could babies six years old stand up against the pushing crowd of the world? I had forgotten, for the moment, that Binky would take them with him across the Atlantic, and that I was to stay in Iroquois.

I flung it all, with a violent effort of will, out of my mind, and began to count sheep going through a gate. I counted three hundred and sixty-five. They scrambled about, bumping into each other, grubby, senseless things, and then I perceived that it was growing light in the room. There was a drift of snow on the floor under the windows, but it seemed to have stopped snowing now. The light was clear with a promise of a sun about to rise in a cloudless sky. I had not much more time in

which to decide what I was going to do. Suddenly Binky spoke. He asked that same question. He took everything between us for granted, all the facts, I mean, of our mutual understanding.

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know."

"You'd like to — to get rid of me, I suppose?"

I looked at it. I felt unutterably weary at the sight of it.

"It doesn't matter what I'd like," I said, after a little.

"It's for you to decide." He moved and raised himself on his elbow, and I knew he was looking at me now.

"No. You see, you want something. I don't think I want anything. There's nothing I can want!" I was thinking of Jim. Jim hadn't come into it before. "Except the children," I added, and then that fearful tiredness seemed to turn me quite cold, dreadfully cold.

The silence now was complete, except for the little sounds of the fire and the clock and footsteps moving somewhere. The wind had died down. Presently a shaft of sunlight shot into the room. I closed my eyes and heard him get out of bed, and move about the room gathering up towels and soap and clothes. He pulled up the blinds and threw more wood on the fire. At the door he paused.

"I leave it to you," he said, before he went out into the hall.

Pat had to leave by an early train, and all the rest went with him except Phyllis and Binky and Jim and myself. I was to see that Phyllis got comfortably home.

The doctor said, of course, that she had had a wonderful escape, but would feel the effect of the shock for some days. We left Otrago at eleven o'clock, driving in a sleigh to the station. My father's private car was attached to the train, and I arranged Phyllis carefully on a couch with pillows and rugs and a hot-water bottle.

"Good heavens, my dear, I'm all right!" she kept insisting. "I'm fine! I don't feel badly a bit." She lay languidly smiling and playing cat's cradle with Jim. Binky sat watching them.

"You're a clumsy thing, Jim, my boy!" she gurgled, pulling the string away from him. "But you've got the prettiest baby eyes. Hasn't he, Joan?"

"Go on, you've seen my eyes before," muttered Jim, flushing.

"But I never noticed how curly your eyelashes are. Do you remember when Pat gave you a black eye?"

"When was that?" put in Binky.

"That was when Pat lived over a saloon in Grant Street," she laughed. "Poor old Pat! He used to frighten us out of our wits. Our mothers wouldn't let us play with him. Jim used to be very good with his fists — the best fighter in the 'Hot Push.'"

"What was the 'Hot Push'?" asked Binky.

"It was a youthful American version of the Turf Club." She gurgled entrancingly through half-shut eyes. "Give me a cigarette, there's a dear!" Binky obeyed.

Jim and I went to the rear-end of the car, and sat watching the track slide away from under the train. Here and there through the snowy country, a grey, wooden farm-house lifted its shingled roof out of the snowdrifts. An occasional waggon struggled along a

deep-rutted road. We talked very little. It didn't seem worth while trying to make-believe, and I hadn't the courage to find out how much he perceived.

It was a two hours' journey. We got to the Central Station at one. A thaw had set in, and the languor of the weather seemed to me all of a piece with my own languor. The snow was already grimy, and was turning to slush. Water dripped from every roof and gable, and ran gurgling in the gutters. What was the use of anything, I thought, if the glory of a blizzard could dissolve into mud in two days? The softness of the air, a travesty of spring, made me feel sick.

Phil's car and mine were waiting for us. She nestled back into hers, and looked out at me from her dark furs, her snowy face wistfully tired. There was a patch of surgeon's plaster showing under her pale hair, but her face was as lovely as the face of a frail and weary goddess.

"Binky will take you home," I said.

She demurred. "I'm all right, Johnny, darling, I am really. He needn't bother."

"He may as well," I insisted. "Jim will come with me. I'll drop him at the club." At that Phyllis very slightly raised her eyebrows and smiled a vulgar little meaning smile. I turned away quickly. She seemed to me, of a sudden, utterly worthless and coarse. Her smile had said as plainly as words, that in that case she wouldn't worry about me any more. I had not been completely miserable until that moment.

"She's not worth it," I said to myself savagely. I had wanted to believe that she was worth Binky's attentions. It was humiliating to me, in the extreme, to hand him over to a vulgar creature. I marvelled at his taste,

that was so fastidious and sure, among values that he was accustomed to. I couldn't put it all down to her strangeness and newness. He must have seen evidences of her poverty of mind, but then, after all, she had dazzled me for years.

Jim must have known by that time, if not before, what it was all about. I was conscious as we drove through the crowded, clanging, slippery streets, that he, too, was nervous and tired.

"Come and have lunch with me," he said abruptly.

"No, thanks, I must get home."

"Nonsense, there's no one at home for you to hurry back to."

"I don't want to, Jim."

"Let me come home to lunch with you, then."

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't want you to. I'll lunch with the children. I'm very tired."

I saw, by his reflection in the glass of the motor, that he was unhappy. He didn't know what to do for me. There was nothing he could do for me. He looked so sweet and so perplexed that I laughed, but when I put him down at the club, I kept him for a moment standing there at the window of the car. I couldn't bear to let him go. For that one moment I was very near throwing it all over. It seemed to me that if I left him there and went home alone, I should be alone for ever. I thought of the other two rolling smoothly back together, cosy and happy, with all the wonder and romance of their discovery; and I held on to Jim.

"Jim," I said, "Jim!" He had his hand on the ledge of the open window. I grabbed it. "Jim," I

said again. I couldn't bring out another word. His face grew dark in that strange way, expressive of a tumult inside him, his dear, chubby, absurd face; I clung to the sight of it. The expression in his eyes seemed to hold for me all the sweetness and all the idealism of our youth. I felt that I was going to move away from him up Jefferson Drive, straight into a hopeless middle-age.

"Only tell me what to do," he muttered.

"Nothing. There's nothing." I flung myself back against the cushions, and he, after a moment's hesitation, turned away into the club.

I lunched with Arch and Humpy. They were noisily glad to see me. They choked me with hugs. Their charm tortured me. My father didn't come up. I went up to his room and sat down in his chair to wait. I had never been so tired in my life. I felt that if he didn't come home soon I should die of tiredness. After a time I noticed that tears were squeezing themselves under my closed eyelids. There was nothing in it for me, any way you looked at it. My mind kept revolving about that fact dizzily, and for the rest all my energy was taken up in not thinking of Binky and Phyllis. They were at home together now. Pat was down town. I tried very hard not to visualize them together, not to wonder what they were saying to one another. I laboured and toiled with my brain to keep them off and shut them out, but I heard them talking about me. They referred to me very kindly and considerately. They admitted my good points. They surmised, indeed, they felt sure that I should behave well. Good God! All the time they so tactfully alluded to me, they were hating me for being there.

It was dark in my father's room when he came in.

"Joan!" he exclaimed, as he turned on the light.

"Yes, I've been waiting for you."

I remember quite distinctly the clothes he had on, a greyish-brown tweed suit. His face was reddened by the cold, and his hair rather rumpled. Evidently in spite of the thaw of midday he had been to the Winter Club for the curling. He stood smiling and chafing his cold hands.

"Yes, I've been waiting for you," I said.

He came quickly toward me, and as I looked up at his tall figure, his white hair, his deep eyes under their fierce eyebrows, I stiffened under the terrible surge of temptation to throw myself into his arms and blurt it all out.

"I wanted to talk to you," I said, biting off my words in a panic. It was so very dangerous. I was so very near breaking down. I had to tell him something, just enough to explain my conduct, not enough to let him know the truth. I got up and pushed him into the chair, and sat on the arm of it a little behind him, so that he couldn't see me.

"I wanted to tell you that I'm not going back to London with Binky."

"Is he going back?"

"Yes, of course, sometime soon. I mean that I'm not going back with him at all."

He gave an exclamation and tried to move round in his chair, but I held him with my arms round his neck, and talked over his head.

"Sit still, dear, let me tell you." I kissed the top of his head to gain time. "I am going to stay with you always. I'm not going back. You are my father,

and you must keep me here. Binky and I — are not going to live together any more."

I had not realized what a shock it would be to him; had not at all anticipated how he would take it. It seemed utterly strange to me that I should call down his anger on me just then, of all times, when I was so very tired. He had been angry with me so seldom in my lifetime. I had forgotten what his anger was like.

It seems strange to me now that I should have been so stupid about my father. He was an American. I seemed to have forgotten that. I seemed to have forgotten the passion with which Americans believe in moral laws and ideals. But that was only a part of it. I had never realized what it had cost him to give me to Binky. He had almost completely effaced himself during the days before my marriage. He had been there solely as a support, and I had taken his support as a matter of course. I had taken it lightly, in feverish happiness, quite unaware of the enormity of his sacrifice. He had never let me see how lonely he was when I left him, but I saw it all now. I saw him going back to Iroquois without me, and settling down there with Jerry to the contemplation of my life and my happiness and my future. I saw him playing countless solitary games of patience in the long evenings, while he thought about me and my husband and my children. He had sunk far more of the capital of his affections and his vitality in my venture, than I had ever put into anything. He had speculated on a vast scale in my enterprise, and at my request, and with only my guarantee. It was as though he had been ruined by my treachery. I had taken the riches of his heart and had embezzled them.

He was on his feet now, and his appearance was terrible. His passionate anger was commensurate with his love for me and his hope. I was frightened.

"How dare you talk so lightly of leaving your husband?" he thundered. He seemed to grow enormously tall. He seemed of a tremendous weight, and I felt that if he fell on me I should be crushed.

"Father," I said, "father!" I held out my hands to him.

He ignored them. "What do you mean by all this? Have you been deceiving me? You told me just the other day——" He glared. His eyes were on fire, and I cowered under his glare. I felt guilty. I knew that I was guilty.

"Yes, I've been deceiving you." The fact that I had deceived him from the beginning, when Binky first made love to me, suddenly became of immense importance, a final and tremendous condemnation.

"How long has this been going on?"

"I don't know."

"Has he been untrue to you?"

"No — not exactly."

At that he burst out again. "Good God! Not exactly — not exactly untrue!"

I perceived how terribly different were the standards of different men. I sat aghast at this recognition of my father's exact and splendid emphasis. Loyalty was an absolute thing. I saw this strangely.

He was waiting for me to go on, and I fumbled for words.

"He doesn't care for me now, and I don't care for him as I used to. That's all." I shuddered to find myself lying again to him. "You see, I can't live with

him if I don't love him. How can I live with him if I don't love him? My dear — oh, my dear — I am very unhappy. Don't be so terribly — hard. Don't — I — I — can't bear it. I am so very lonely. I am so tired." I broke down then. I slid into the chair and shook violently. It was no good trying to control myself.

His anger did not subside at once. He turned away from me with a groan. It seemed to me a long time before he came to me and lifted me and took me in his arms.

"My child, my child!" he muttered then, terribly moved, terribly shaken.

"I will tell you everything," I said at last. "I had better tell you everything."

And so I told him some of the things, everything that I could remember and make clear to him about Binky and myself. I told him how, when I learned about Binky's other son, I had found it impossible to go on as before. And I told him how we had grown more and more estranged since then, but I didn't tell him about Binky and Phyllis. I couldn't. It was impossible to name them to him, together, and besides that wasn't, it seemed to me, my business.

When I had finished he sat still, so still that I was as frightened by his silence as by his thunder. He looked sad and old, and a kind of feebleness seemed to have come upon him. I had always thought of him as magnificently strong — and I knew then that he was broken, and that I had done it. Something had snapped within him, and he would grow old now. My understanding of what was in his mind was the worst of all the things that had come to me.

"After your mother died, when you were still a child, I was afraid for you," he said at last. "But"—he hesitated as though the words hurt him—"I trusted your taste." It was a curious thing for him to say. He was sinking in his own furious disappointment in the greater sense of my tragedy. He was so fine, so great. He would never reproach me. I saw that. I was his own, and my doom was his own, for he regarded it as my doom. He knew that I had ruined my life. He knew what I had missed, for I had missed what he had had.

"Death," he went on, "is nothing. I have not lost your mother in death."

"I know that," I whispered, watching his face in my despair.

I learned, too, in that hour from him what I had missed. I saw the supreme beauty of loyalty, the costly beauty of faithfulness.

We sat silent together, clinging together until Edward knocked on the door and said that dinner was served. I remembered then where Binky had gone. Had he come back, I wondered? Surely he must have come in long ago! Pat would have come home. I shuddered with disgust. My father's presence made that muddle disgusting to me.

He stopped me as I was leaving him, and a strange severity came into his voice again.

"You must see it through, Joan."

"See it through?" I echoed.

"You can't get out of it. It's yours. He is yours. You chose him."

"But——" I stammered. He cut me short.

"You must——" And then as I slunk away he added

to my back: "You will, in time, come to like him again, if you see it through."

How did he know? I felt at the time that he was completely at sea. I could think only of Binky and Phyllis, and their hatred and their pleasure. Wasn't it strange that he saw through and beyond it all? I was still blinded by all the cheap things I had gathered out of life, the cheap pleasures and excitement and sensations and vanities I had so greedily purchased. I was still to go on dealing in this rubbish, buying it more and more feverishly. The arresting vision opened to me by my father wasn't enough to last me very long. He hadn't succeeded in really pulling me out of the muddle. His trust was, after all, a mistake, and yet what he prophesied has come true — only not as he hoped. He didn't foresee the war. It took the war to bring about what he said. It's curious, his knowing ahead like that.

I found Binky downstairs in the hall. He was not dressed for dinner. He stood there with a telegram in his hand, and as I came down he looked at me like a person struggling to rouse himself out of a horrid sleep.

"Uncle Archie is dead," he said.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ONE had no right, I suppose, to expect Phyllis to understand or even ignorantly to fear anything so vaguely imperative as the command of Uncle Archie's ghost. It was natural that she should think that if she only kicked energetically enough, her proficient little feet could disperse that fact which was to her as nebulous as a cloud. How could she possibly know that a thing so vague as Binky's obligation was still as hard and fixed as a star, and as far out of reach of her spurning toe? Her antics were as futile and unbecoming as though she had literally aimed one foot after another in violent and rapid succession toward some shrouded constellation in the heavens. So, at least, they seemed to me, but to Binky, who was so under her spell, they must have seemed merely bewildering and disappointing. He was too surprisedly, too utterly unprepared for her attitude to think it absurd. It seemed to him as unaccountable as the reversing of the law of gravitation, and he stared at it with a kind of awe, just as he would have stared if she had jumped into the air and gone on upward over the roofs. That describes the two of them fairly well. She jumped, and he expected her to come down again to meet him on some sort of solid ground of understanding, but instead she flew away out of his sight with a whirl of her petticoats, and he was left gaping.

I gathered from his agitation and from what he said

to me and did not say, that he had received a rebuff almost at once, when they drove off to her home together from the railway-station. It was a case of his having taken everything for granted, in the way my father called so very English. She had allowed him, he thought, to take everything for granted. The thing seemed to him of a great and beautiful simplicity. These things are, in his world. But he was not in his world. He was in Phil's very attractively crowded drawing-room, a drawing-room crowded with every conceivable coquettish obstacle to the business of passion. And he found himself up against the most bewildering array of reservations, prohibitions, demands, and scruples. He gave the impression, that evening, of a man who had come straight from embracing a hornets' nest, or at least a nest of flies that buzzed as annoyingly as hornets, if their sting was not so deadly. All those things she professed, and the things she promised, and the things she exacted, were singing still in his ears. All her kisses and her stings and her little slaps on his face. It was impossible for him to hide from me the signs of them. I heard them and I saw them, and I marvelled that he wanted to go back to that torment, for he did. He was eager to be stung so long as he might be kissed. Such was the sweetness of her lips that he would do anything that he might drink it, except just that one thing.

Phyllis is very clever. She was clever enough to mix just the right proportions of drugs and poisons and stimulants in the drink she gave him. She got him into the most pitiful state, more than half demented, wholly intoxicated, and then she sent him reeling from her. She kept him there in the most perfectly calculated proximity,

at just the most deadly minimum of distance for five hours, and then at exactly ten minutes to six she flung him lightly out of the door, allowing herself ten minutes to get ready for Pat.

Binky came home and found the telegram. Up to that point he had, I gathered, been undecided. His struggle with her had been half-hearted. She had almost succeeded in making a double divorce and marriage with her seem possible. He wasn't then quite inevitably tied. Under her hypnotic murmurs he had almost persuaded himself that he was a free agent. The prize that she dangled before his eyes seemed worth the sacrifice of his self-esteem. He was, when she had finished with him, resolved to try to get out of the tangle of his financial indebtedness to us, my father and me. But Uncle Archie, with that final capricious act of death, as he put it afterwards, settled his hash. It was hopeless.

Such violent adjustments in such a short space of time are confusing even to write about. When he announced the news to me, in that almost imbecile tone, before dinner, I had the sensation of falling from a great height on to a very soft, uncertain surface, and of sprawling there helplessly. I felt like a circus-performer who had dropped from a trapeze, and was obliged to walk across one of those great sagging nets they sling under trapezes. I made for the ground cautiously and with difficulty, unaccustomed to such performances. The thing swung and quaked under me.

Jerry saved us at dinner. We couldn't talk to each other, my father and Binky and I, so we all talked to him. We kept our eyes on his face. We clung to him, at least Binky and I did. We wrapped ourselves up

in the sane light of his broad, freckled face, and tried to reflect it back to him, and he, all unaware, saved me. Dear Jerry! He liked Binky always, and he likes him now. He loved Phyllis always, and he loves her now. He has always helped us. He is one of those priceless, insignificant people who make it comfortable for egoists in this world.

I went up to my room at once after dinner. Binky would have to tell my father about Uncle Archie. I didn't want to be there, for I didn't know what I could say. I knew he would follow me. There were things we had to talk over. He would be going off at once, and I had to make up my mind what I was going to do. I knew what there was to do, but I felt for those long minutes when I sat alone, that it was impossible to do it. And yet — if I didn't, where was I? My father wouldn't help me. He expected the impossible of me. And now that Uncle Archie was dead, I could no longer delude myself into thinking that the children were mine. I was theirs certainly. I was to follow them as a slave, loving them fiercely and impotently, trying, with futile, fumbling hands, to ward off evils and dangers from them; but they didn't belong to me, they belonged to those houses and castles and traditions and conventions over there, in that country of Binky's exacting ancestors and relations. Wouldn't it be better for me to let them go? They wouldn't want me much, for very long. I saw my life as a humiliating, ignominious thing. Was it worth living for ever in a false position, so that I might work for them and be loved by them a little, and hurt very much? I saw Aunt Cora beckoning to me peremptorily, and Clem and Monica gracefully waiting for me to be led like a lamb to the

slaughter. I saw crowds and crowds of relations calmly expecting me to play the part they had so graciously given me in their funny old English pantomime. It angered me to think they had power over me as well as Binky; yet they had. They had the power of an established and arrogant sect over a poor little heathen. If I didn't accept baptism at their hands they would take my children from me and pronounce a ban against me. It was almost altogether a question of the children then. Binky didn't come into it, until he brought himself in. I had taken leave of him only twenty-eight hours before, and I was incapable of constructing a new world with him in it again.

He brought himself in, however, with the look of utter helplessness that greeted me when he opened the door. My heart sank as I looked into his face. I knew then that I couldn't go back on him, and, although his first remark and most of his words, that night, kept obscuring the issue by hurting me quite irrelevantly, I still knew all the time what the issue was and what the outcome would be.

His first remark was: "I don't understand her — she beats me." He dropped into a chair and remained there, huddled up and crumpled. I was waiting for him to curse Uncle Archie for dying, and I was utterly astonished. I didn't realize at the moment that he'd no time to think things out, that all the complicated bits of his puzzle were lying about loose in his mind, and that he just picked up the first one and handed it over to me. It became clear, however, soon enough, that I was to put the thing together for him. He couldn't without my help. Phyllis had seen to that by deranging his wits and playing the devil with his nerves.

"You know her better than I do. What's her idea?" He sunk his chin into his collar. He had on still the clothes he'd put on at Green Gables that morning, and he appeared, for him, almost grubby. His face was mottled, too, and puffy about the eyes. It looked rather as it looked the other day when he came home on a week's leave. Phyllis had left traces very similar to the traces of the war.

"Her idea," I said, "is marriage."

He pondered over it.

"Yes. I suppose it was."

"It is," I corrected.

"Yes, of course. She doesn't know. I only got the telegram at dinner-time." He brought this out pettishly, annoyed at my preciseness, as a sick child might be annoyed with a nurse.

"It still will be," I said again.

He gave himself a jerk. "What do you mean by that?"

"I mean it still will be when she knows all — all the more so."

He looked at me suspiciously for a moment. For one moment he distrusted me. The thought passed through his mind that I was going to try and turn him against her.

"It's not," I said, "that she only wants your paraphernalia. It's simply that she won't see why she shouldn't have it all thrown in."

He stared. He stared a long time, then because it was too much for him, all at once he went back to the beginning again.

"I had to tell her today that it was all a question for you, not for us." He ground his teeth. A hot flush

of anguish spread over his face. "I had to tell her that if you chose to get rid of me I should be a pauper." He could scarcely get on with it. "I had to tell her your father had made settlements — that — that would have to be re — rearranged — that it would be a question of being poor. I said I didn't mind that, but — she took it — queerly."

"How did she take it?"

"She laughed — and put it off — switched into something else."

I felt very sorry for him. I saw her switching off into something else — kisses and laughter and wheedling — but it was not my business to see all that, it was my business to get the main point clear.

"And when she came back to it?" I asked.

"She said any one could do anything if they wanted to enough."

"There you are!" I burst out. "That's her point of view."

We seemed to have completed a definite section of the puzzle. We paused together and looked at it, and then he brought out all irrelevantly, with a groan, and quite unconscious that he spoke aloud:

"I didn't want to discuss things. I didn't want to talk at all." He groaned again inarticulately like a sick man horribly hurt, and then I caught the words: "God, what a lot of talk!" He twisted and gave himself a wrench, and jumped to his feet, suddenly conscious of me and of the display he was affording me.

"I'm a swine to come to you like this. I beg your pardon. I've no right — it's ridiculous — absurd — worse."

I said nothing. What could I say? It was ridiculous

— or it would have been if it hadn't been so dreadful — if I hadn't seen the vulgar cruelty of Phyllis so clearly marked on him.

"I shall have to leave tomorrow — sail on Wednesday." He tried to assume a dry, definite tone, but it broke down at once, for he was up against horrors again. He had something to ask of me about myself. He choked over it. He couldn't bring it out. He turned his back, kicked the fire, and then again he went back, abandoning the thing that was too much for him.

"I must see her tomorrow. How can I?"

"I will get her here if you can't go there," I said coldly. I wanted to get on with the real business. His good taste saved him from thanking me. He was stranded again.

It was terribly hard for him, poor dear! He is a sensitive creature, not so sensitive as Jim was, but more so than I had ever given him credit for. He felt that he had been guilty of very bad taste in letting me see how much he cared about Phyllis. That is how it would appear to him. I was, so I perceived long afterwards, on a different plane altogether. His idea was somewhat similar to that of a little king in his own kingdom. He regarded me, though it may sound absurd, as his consort, and his love-affairs ought not to have been dragged into my presence. Now that he had actually come into his inheritance, and he saw us fixed in our little chairs of state, it seemed to him that he had almost insulted me. This woman who had brought a dowry to his bankrupt house, had been humiliated. He was ashamed. He was also rather frightened. He realized that it was

quite conceivable that I should abdicate. If I chose to abandon him, he could not possibly ask me to stay. He had no right to, and with all that formal sense of his own dignity put aside, he had too much respect for me.

He stood with his back to me, in silence. "I shall catch the *Mauretania*," he brought out again. "And you?" at last he managed to mutter into the fire. "What are your plans?" If he hadn't turned around to face me at last — I waited long for him to turn — I don't know what I should have said. I couldn't have said what I did if I hadn't seen in his face finally, while I tortured him staring at it, that Phyllis was, after all, of secondary importance, that he was really urged by an impulse deep enough, compelled by a summons serious enough, to carry him through, afterwards.

"I shall follow you with the children," I said then.

The silence that succeeded this was precarious. I was in a panic lest he give away. It seemed to me of tremendous importance for us, for the whole of the dreary, complex future, that he should take it casually and with a certain stiffness. It came to me of a sudden, that his nonchalance was, after all, of a piece with his religion, and that it had to do with the central spring in him. If that spring snapped now, it seemed to me we should collapse together, and the dignity of the future, which was the one thing left to us, would be gone.

He quivered, as I say, he trembled on the very edge of a humiliating breakdown. He all but put out his poor, grateful hands to me. If he had, I should have always beheld him as contemptible. I might even have thrown him over after giving him my word. But he caught him-

self in time. I saw it all come back to him. It was as though Uncle Archie had thrown his own beautiful mantle over him to cover up Phil's dirty little finger-marks.

"That's all right, then! It's good of you, my dear, to take all the fag of travelling with them alone." He did it very well. He did it beautifully, even to the finishing touch of pulling out his cigarette-case, twisting a piece of paper, which he held to the fire, and lighting his cigarette with it, before he said "Good-night," and left me.

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN the meantime, Louise had set going the little buzzing clock of her doom. That's the second time I've used this word "doom." It's a big word to use twice in a story, but it is no bigger than my father's feeling about me, and it is quite conventionally apt as regards poor Louise. Any one would admit it in her case. It wasn't only that she made him kill her, but that she brought him finally to it, just when she might have begun to live.

I have tried to see things clearly. I have thought about it all for so many hours and days and nights, that I know now that it was not my doing. If I had to condemn myself as regards Louise, I could never say a word of all this. I could never write a word about my own life except one word. Of course there have been hysterical times when I have blamed myself and lacerated myself, but that sort of thing is just the revenge of God for having been slighted in other connections. As I've said before, I might have saved them both by being true to Jim long ago, when there was a chance of marrying him, but for the afterwards, as regards Louise, my conscience is clear.

It seems that she came home after the blizzard, having telegraphed the time of her arrival, that she arrived at nine o'clock by the "Twentieth Century" from New York on the Monday morning, and that Jim was not there

to meet her. The car was at the station, but no Jim, and the chauffeur told her his master was out of town. Two shocks: the first, not seeing Jim, who had always met her at the station on every single occasion when she'd been away without him; the second, that he was out of town, for he had declined to accompany her on her trip to New York on the ground that he was too busy. Jim had not lied to her. She had gone to New York for a week, and he had gone to Otrago for two days, but she couldn't be expected to know that all at first, or to admit the importance of the difference when she did know it. She hurried home, and was told by the butler that Mr. Van Orden had gone with Major and Mrs. Dawkins to Otrago Lake, and had not returned. At eleven o'clock she telephoned me. I remembered afterwards that Edward told me she had telephoned. She got little satisfaction out of Edward. By this time, in an acute state of irritation, not knowing what to do with herself, she ordered the car again and rushed round to her mother to talk it all over. Her mother was out too. That was most unfortunate for all of us. For once Mrs. Bowers was needed, and for once she was not there. Louise would have complained of Jim for going away without telling her, for not being home to meet her, for being an indifferent husband, and that would have been the end of it. Mrs. Bowers might have helped us all by providing poor Louise with a safety-valve, but she didn't, and Louise, feeling forsaken and deceived by all the world, with a train headache and an empty stomach — she had eaten, of course, no breakfast — ordered the car again and went whizzing down town to buy things, the spending of money being the only outlet for her distress, that she could think of. As luck would have it, in the middle of

Jefferson Drive she met Patrick O'Brien, standing in the snow leaning over the hood of his machine. Under ordinary circumstances she would have given him the coldest and smallest of nods, but some demon of intuition possessed her. She saw his bags in the front of his car, and she stopped, beckoning him to cross the road to her. He presented his huge head, that she disliked so intensely, at the window of her brougham — it always made her squirm, she said, "it never looked clean, that bush of red"— and she asked him peremptorily, showing her white, sharp little teeth, where he had been. He informed her in one long, hurried breath, that he'd come from Otrago, was in an awful hurry, had to get home and change, and meet a man on business, and hoped she'd had a good trip — but she kept him.

"Where's your wife?"

"I had to leave her. She'd knocked her head open ice-boating." Then a gleam came into his face. Pat has a savage sense of humour. "I left her to Major Dawkins. He'll bring her home all right!"

"Not alone?" panted Louise, breathless with horrid discoveries.

"Oh, well, no — not quite. Your husband and his wife are with 'em." He gave a guffaw. "We had a hot time, I can tell you. Too bad you weren't there! So long." She let him go.

It's easy enough to see how it would affect her, provided you remembered how she hated Phyllis, and all too easy if you admit that she was already, indeed had been always, jealous of me.

She didn't go down town, she turned round and went home. She took off her things and sat down and waited for Jim. He didn't come. She refused lunch, and sat

on working it out, working it out. It's funny to think of her sitting there thinking deadly things about me and Jim, while I was sitting thinking too, in my father's room.

Jim told me about it long, long afterwards — after we had buried her — before he went away. He told me that it all began then, that day, and he suggested, in that weary detachment, as though he were the dead one talking to some other man who was alive, that it hadn't seemed to pay, being good. He always puts things in those funny, childish terms. He'd been good, he said, for ten years, had never let himself think of me or dream of me as his love, and it hadn't made him happy or brought him any reward. Jim's language is sometimes very quaint.

I remember so well the way his words echoed in the billiard-room at Saracens. Sometimes he spoke very loud and sometimes in a whisper, but all the time with a peculiar distinctness, the kind of mediumistic distinctness that my mother's voice used to have when she prayed over me. While he was talking, he walked slowly round the billiard-table with his hand rubbing along the cushion. Opposite the window he would stop and look out, and then resume his walk again. It was a day of mist and rain. The fog rolled up to the windows and rolled back again, revealing the green lawns and the brown trees. Sometimes we were shut in by the blanket of it, and then we were released again. His pauses at the window were longest when he could see nothing, and his voice then came to me in a whisper.

"I was untrue to you always, so that I could be true to her. She was like that. She twisted me into knots. She made me crooked with the whole world. I loved

you. You were my sweetheart — I mean you were the wife of my soul, but I always kissed her whenever she wanted me to, and I didn't kiss her when she didn't want me to." He said all this, staring away, at me or through me, it didn't matter, always as though I weren't there. Actually as the light waned and the room grew dark, he talked to me about myself in the third person. It was very curious and terrible. He would say, walking away down the table:

"Louise had no right to be jealous of Joan!" And then coming up the other side: "I gave my wife all she wanted — I swear I did, until she began to make that awful fuss. She kept it up for three years — the fuss. She said things about Joan. I wonder what made her? I don't understand!"— stopping at the window. "She didn't want any more children after that first one. She didn't want me to love her much. She only wanted me to be always there dancing attendance, and she wanted those sables, and I gave them to her, and the diamonds and emeralds. It must have been that she-devil, her mother! If I'd had the nerve to kill her mother, it would have been all right. All right in a way. Of course it couldn't have been very right for me, anything, because I lost my nerve when I was a kid. I was afraid of Joan. She was wild."

He looked small under those great windows. He is small, but that expanse of glass seemed to diminish him very much. Presently he would realize that it was there behind him in a chair by the fire.

"You admit that you were wild, don't you? You must blame me, of course, for not trusting you then, when you kissed me in the sun, but you admit that you were dangerous. I was afraid of you, and afraid of drinking too

much." He went on walking. "There was nothing wild about Louise. She did her best, too, to make me give it up — drinking, I mean — but you can't do that sort of thing without loving very much. You see I had to have something — I've always, constantly, wanted to be drunk. I love getting drunk. When I'm drunk I'm not afraid. Louise was good. I should think she drank about a thousand gallons of milk while she lived with me. You could taste the milk on her lips, though they didn't look like that. She used lip-salve, but she thought it wicked to put rouge on her cheeks. She liked to have men admire her, but she never let them make love to her. She was mine. I never let any one else look at her. If I saw a man looking at her, I kicked him out of the house. She was my prize doll that I'd bought. I kept her tied up in a box, and she liked it." There was no energy in all this, merely that cruel distinctness. "She liked to have rows so that she could make it up again. I expect that's what she wanted this time. I couldn't stand any more making-up. We'd had three years of rows. The first one was that day when she got home from New York — the first real one. She asked me how I dared go to a house-party where the O'Briens were. It's funny their being here this time. She seemed to think I had been guilty toward her, in going to stay in the same house with Phyllis. She said Phyllis was having a low intrigue with your husband — a low intrigue, that was her expression. I let her go on about Phyllis. Phyllis's reputation wasn't any of my business. Then she said something about you, and how living in London had made you depraved. I don't know where she got that word 'depraved'— I shut her up then — I suppose my getting angry gave her her cue. She said she'd no doubt you

would like to console yourself with an intrigue on your own. You can't blame me for getting angry then. It was the least I could do for you. I told her if she ever spoke of you again I'd smash her face. It's funny how people who know how to be polite can talk when they're angry. She was frightened then. She never did mention you again to me — not in all that three years of rows — but she was always thinking about you, I expect. I didn't know or I never would have let her come here. I don't see how she could have kept on thinking — you were out of sight. You've been out of sight most of the time. I've never been to see you. I've never written to you.

"I used to go away when I couldn't stand it any longer. I went to Ireland once, for some hunting. She never believed I hadn't been to see you. She kept asking me all about that trip, where I'd stayed on the 15th and the 16th, wanted me to account to her for every hour. I did, but she thought I'd lied and had squeezed in London somehow. I was only in Ireland a month. I never stayed away from her long. I would have managed all right if she had been willing to do her part. I mean I'd have kept respectable. It's the business of loving wives to keep their husbands respectable if they don't want to be jealous. She didn't ever mention you, but she was always making scenes about other people. What had they got to do with her? I didn't love them. She found out once that I had a flat in New York and kept a little girl there. She was a nice girl. She was kind to me and honest. I kept her from starving. She had a kid five years old. She was quite happy in that flat. There was a fearful row when Louise found out. I told her it was none of her business. The woman had nothing to do

with her. She said that I was her husband and belonged to her — that marriage was a sacred thing. I suppose she was right in a way — about marriage, only ours wasn't a marriage any more, or ever, for that matter. She brought her mother into it. I told her — the mother — to go to the devil. Louise didn't want me in her bedroom, so I'd made other arrangements. Her mother wasn't shocked a bit. She winked. Her wink was the ugliest thing on God's earth. It made Louise look quite beautiful. I suppose I was rather glad, somehow, that Louise cared. Her rows were better, anyhow, than Mrs. Bowers's pats. I gave up the flat in New York. Louise was happy for a couple of months, but she got frightened about having another kid. She played the martyr, made me feel like a brute, so I left her alone again. Curious — she never enjoyed it! I couldn't go on bothering her, seeing her grit her teeth. And I couldn't stand her pose of the long-suffering woman. I gave it up. I was a monk for a time. You can't go on like that indefinitely. One of my wife's friends angled for me. I was hooked. I hated her. She used to lunch with Louise, and say she was her dearest friend. Once I caught them kissing each other. It made me sick. I went to South America with Jerry. Jerry did me a lot of good. Then the kid died. Louise nearly went off her head. I thought she had. I don't know why that didn't save us. It must have been the she-devil interfering again. Louise was a mother — you know what kind of a mother she was. Her occupation was gone. She was very queer. Then her mother suggested her having another child. She had hysterics, said she wasn't going through all that again. It would kill her. To have one child born and one child die was enough. I took her to Japan. She got better. She be-

gan her old tricks. Then she insisted on coming here. I thought it was safe. I thought she'd forgotten."

It was quite dark when he finished. He had talked for a long time, walking round and round the billiard-table. I couldn't have stopped him if I had wanted to. And I didn't want to. There was no reason why he should talk, and no reason why he should keep still.

It was all over, and we were all dead to each other, though Louise was the only one who had been put away into the ground and into oblivion. It wasn't necessary for him to consider her any more — she was dead, and he was dead too — to trick himself with sentimental lies. He just looked at it with the awful calm of a dead person. He had never been calm before. All his life had been a tumult. That was over. He had given it up — his struggle. The hope which had lived in him to make him passionate and restless, was gone now. He had always hoped, up to that very last night, that 10th of September two years ago, that he would be able somehow to reconcile his life with truth, that he would be able to reconcile Louise with me, in his own mind. Now he had done away with us both. You see how completely I have lost him! Some one told me, the other day, that he had joined the French Foreign Legion and had gone to the war. I don't know. It makes no difference to me. There is not even any joy for me in thinking that he may die bravely. A dead man can't die again.

Louise carried his soul with her into that coffin that we buried at Saracens. I knew it, as clearly as if I'd seen her dead hand take the heart out of his breast and hide it under the clothing of her corpse. He had no moral sense nor any regret nor any desires after that. One can't criticize his taste in talking to me, for he had no

sense of human values. His brain was spinning in a void, spinning and throwing off memories as a top, covered with liquid, would throw off drops as it spun. I don't know how he has been living since then. I suppose he has been eating and sleeping and smoking and drinking. I don't know. An automaton if properly made would put on its clothes and take them off again. I expect he'll do all the usual things in the usual way, until the machinery stops.

It's strange that Binky should still be for me a living person when Jim is not. The other day, when Binky was going back to the front after his week at home, he, too, took a dive back into memories. I went with him to the train — that terrible one o'clock from Victoria that takes them all back, poor dears. There was a fog, and the thick yellow darkness, the murky station lights and the noise, gave an added horror and excitement to all those "Good-byes." Belgians and French were going off, too, with our own khaki heroes. A child was crying loudly, as though its silly little heart would break, and women whose hearts were breaking, showed faces white and dreadful in the unreal gloom, and men were trying to be what men are expected to be in these days. It affected Binky and me. That long train that was to tear itself out of the aching side of London and carry them all off to the hungry war, how could it but affect him? Do you think it weak of me to be moved because he was going back perhaps to be killed? He looked rather splendid to me in that dimness, wrapped in his draggled great-coat and muffler, and with his face still weary and lined, and his hair showing white at the sides. He looks old since the war, quite old, but there was that same brightness in

his eyes for a moment, when he gave a hitch to my elbow and said:

"My dear, you're so good to me! It's been a ripping week!" He looked down, and his expression deepened. "You've stood by me," he said shortly. "If you hadn't stood by me——" He looked around. He seemed to want to say that I somehow had had something to do with giving him this chance. I was glad — I am glad, but as I say, if Jim is there and if he dies unnoticed somewhere on the battlefield where a million men are dying, it can make no difference. It can't help. Louise saw to that.

Chapter Nine

WHENEVER I have felt like hating people, something has always happened to make me feel sorry for them. It was so with Phyllis. She had abused Binky's passion as only a vulgar coquette could do, and I was beginning to feel I had a right to hate her, when she fled to me, with the tale of how her husband had beaten her. She didn't exactly tell me how he had done it, whether with a stick or a slipper or a whip, but the fact was clear enough. I didn't want to hear — I tried to stop her — I didn't want to know whether it was her body or her spirit that had suffered most, and I don't want to think of it now. I can't bear to allow myself to wonder whether he did it in blind rage or to the accompaniment of brutal laughter. I hope it was the former, but I'm afraid it was the latter. If it had been blind rage I don't see how he could have let Binky escape, or how he could ever, even after an interval of three years, have brought Phyllis to stay with us. That was a lurid flare of his sense of humour — that was his boisterous revenge on Binky. He wanted us to see how perfectly he had subdued her and how little it all mattered.

It was the morning after Binky left to catch his boat in New York, that we three, Louise and Phyllis and I, had our uncomfortable and futile *séance*. I was in bed with one of those headaches which cannot be conjured off

with any nervous effort of will, or done to death with drugs. I had my head tied round with a wet towel, and I lay on my bed listening to the throbs in it, that punctuated the echo of Binky's final talk. He had given me to understand that Phyllis regarded his departure as flight. He had warned me that I might have her to deal with. With a wild vagueness he had announced that he didn't know what she might not do or say. His state was pitiful. He seemed to think he might have to come back to set things right, either for me or for her, or for both of us, I couldn't make out which. If he could come back in a month or so, he would wire me, but if things were too exacting and binding and muddled over there, he would simply have to leave it to me, to get loose by myself. His idea of my difficulty in getting loose, measured, to my mind, the extent of the fuss she had made, the extent to which she had tied him up and intimidated him.

I had shut them into my boudoir the day before, and had stood guard, as it were, in the library. Heaven knows what went on behind those closed doors, not much in the way of love-making, I imagine. Not much, that is, as I should measure the possible wealth of a lover's leave-taking. His announcement of his uncle's death had had the effect I had prophesied. He admitted this to me with something like a cry of rage at my being too awfully clever. It hurt him to find out that I knew her really so well, for he must have known that my scrupulous lack of blame proved I despised her.

We had, too, on top of it all, been obliged to keep an engagement to dine with Mrs. Bowers, and to our dismay had found it a big affair, bigger, I suspected, than she had intended twenty-four hours before. His new

dignity had been too much for her. Her lapse from taste was, in a person so punctilious, what you may call an awful give-away. I can hear her telephoning her choice friends to come and say good-bye to us. We had expected a family dinner. We were suddenly in mourning and should, on no account, have let her inveigh or browbeat us into dining with her had we known. It's funny the way I am obliged to use the "we." The publicity of our union was one of the most ironic things about those days. Our pictures side by side in the papers! Our new names coupled together all over the place.

I don't doubt that Patrick waved some of those papers in Phil's face. I don't doubt that she suffered the most acute anguish possible to a greedy soul. She had felt so sure; she had had the whole thing in her hands, her lovely, white, covetous hands, and it was slipping from her. No wonder she made violent efforts to save it. Her incredible foolishness in telling Pat at all was just the last resort of her frantic little mind.

It was as plain as daylight when she burst into my bedroom against the warnings of my maid and Edward and even of my poor father, it was plain what had happened. I believed her at once.

"He beat me — last night! He beat me!" she whimpered. Of course I believed her. It was just what he would do.

She cried a good deal. She blew her nose repeatedly. She was not pretty with her eyes all swollen and her nose red and her lip twisting, and I felt sorry for her. I saw that some day she would lose all her good looks and her sense of humour — I even thought that they had deserted her already. I didn't reckon with her extreme adaptability, her wonderful faculty for recuperation. When she

came here the other day, two years ago, she had completely forgotten. The fact that she had once admitted to me that her husband had beaten her was nothing to her. She was not in the least ashamed to be seen by me, following him in perfect complacent docility, playing her little hollow game of the circus lady and the tame beast.

I let her cry on the foot of my bed, remarking mildly that my headache made it impossible for me to get worked up over anything.

"But what am I to do?" she wailed. And then in a whisper. "Has he really gone?"

"Yes," I said, my head rigid, my face to the ceiling. She went on sniffling.

"I've burned my bridges," she announced at last absurdly.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that of course I can't go back to Pat now."

"Oh!"

"And as I — I love Humphrey, and he loves me ——"

I must have smiled. It was her calling him Humphrey that made me smile.

"So you think it's funny!" she broke in. "Of course I knew you didn't care, but I can't see why it's funny!"

"It's not funny," I said roughly.

"Well — you smiled!"

"It's not funny — but you are ridiculous. Of course I'm sorry Pat beat you. I'm sorry for my own sake as well as yours. It gives you an advantage over me of which you immediately avail yourself."

"I don't know what you mean, Johnnie!"

"No, I suppose you don't."

There was a silence. After a while she began again, still crying:

"I felt it only right to tell Pat I was in love with Humphrey. I expected he would divorce me."

"And he hasn't?"

"It was only last night."

"These things are done so quickly in America," I murmured.

"How horrid you are to make fun of it! I mean that Pat refused."

"Oh!"

"He won't let me go. He swore it by a lot of Irish saints."

"Then that's settled."

"Oh no," she contradicted quickly.

There was another silence. She began wandering disconsolately round the room. Presently she stopped before the glass and straightened her hat and gave little pats to the golden loops of her hair. As though drawing courage from her reflection, she began powdering her nose and talking at the same time.

"Humphrey says it's impossible for us to marry — but what do you say? You don't want to live with him, do you — after — after all this — now that he's in love with me?" I stared at the incredible vulgarity of her. She went on giving little dainty dabs to her nose with my powder-puff.

"You know quite well that it's not my will that stands in your way."

"You mean Pat, then? Oh, I could divorce him if he won't me. There's plenty of evidence — enough, anyway."

"I don't mean Pat — I mean Binky. I couldn't divorce Binky if I wanted to." I mused a moment over the quality of her mind that so easily visualized the double

divorce business. It came over me with relief that I couldn't and needn't explain to her. "In any case," I went on almost joyfully, "I don't want to divorce Binky, and I'm not going to. You can come over and live with him if you like. He has several houses — I sha'n't interfere."

It took her breath away.

"Do you think — do you think for one minute — I would be — be his mistress? Do you think ——?"

"No, I didn't really think you would. I know you're excessively moral. Your beastliness is quite another sort of thing." I sat up in bed. I was sick of her. What difference did it make to me whether Patrick beat his cook or his wife? "You are only a fiend, my dear, not an immoral woman. You like to drive men out of their wits, but you don't care about satisfying their wants. If I had any hope of your ever going to bed with Binky, I shouldn't be so hard on you."

It was then, while Phyllis was staring at me with her mouth open, aghast at my hideous language, that Louise came in on top of us. I looked at her. It was too much for me. I gave a kind of hysterical yell of laughter, and grabbed my towelled head in my hands. "And here's Louise," I cried. "What's up with Louise? Why do you all come to me? What can I do for you? For God's sake leave me alone! I've got a headache."

My violence brought them together. They stood side by side facing me, grave and frightened. I laughed at them. They didn't like my laughing at them. They were so upset by it that they forgot they hated each other. "What's the matter, Louise?" I shouted. "Out with it. What's the matter?" The noise I made seemed to produce a kind of explosion in her brain.

"Jim's gone away," she blurted out. "Gone, I mean, in a rage — I don't know where!" Then she caught herself, but it was too late.

"Good Lord, what a mess we're all in!" I threw myself back on the pillows. "What a mess! What a mess!" They were speechless. I sat up again, after a minute, and looked at them. Louise had on a black velvet thing trimmed with brown fur by Cherrut. Her hat was a tilted bowl fringed with ospreys from Georgette's. Phyllis had over her frock the most luxurious of chinchilla coats. It reached down to her ankles. Very good pearl ear-rings gleamed in her little ears. The powder-puff had restored her face to at least a passable beauty.

"Man judgeth by the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. I don't know if that's the exact way it goes."

"You're not going crazy, are you?" asked Phyllis.

"I don't know. Do you remember our triumphirate? Poor little triumphirate! It's a funny thing, but I believed in it until four months ago, until I came home to this damned city." I could hear Claire Hobbes' voice as I spoke. I seemed to be talking as she did. I had a feeling of kinship with her, in that moment. I thought, with relief, that I was going back to the land where she was, where people knew a little bit what the things in this world meant, and what they were worth. Her hardness and her brutality seemed of a sudden fine to me, in the face of those two fluffy little conventional devils standing there.

"I'm going back. I'm going to follow Binky back there. I can't do anything more for you — I'm not going to help either of you." I glared at them.

"But, Joan," gasped Louise, "you don't seem to understand! Jim has gone!"

"Let him go, then."

"And I thought—I thought you and your husband——"

"Never mind. Never mind. Don't think. Don't ever think any more. It's bad for you. I've got a headache. Go away. Leave me alone. Go and buy some more clothes, both of you. You're not fit to be seen. Go and get your husbands to forgive you and buy you some more jewels." I must have been very rude. I piled it on. I wanted to get them out of the room. It was very annoying to me to see them there so smart, so empty, so reeking with luxury and so intent on the idea of being tragic heroines.

"Before I go I must ask you one or two questions." Louise pursed her mouth. She looked very determined. "Do you know where Jim is?"

"No."

"Did you know he'd gone away?"

"No."

"Well, then, did you plan your house-party on purpose because I was away?"

"No!" I shouted. "What on earth are you driving at?"

Louise maintained her dignity and quiet beautifully. "You knew quite well that he wouldn't have gone if I'd been home."

"You mean that you wouldn't have, because I was there!" said Phyllis.

Louise lifted her chin. "Never mind what I mean."

Phyllis gave a little snort. "I don't mind, my poor

angel. It's all so obvious." Phyllis was cleverer than Louise always, and Louise knew it. She kept her eyes on me.

"Remember, Joan," she said solemnly. "If Jim has really gone — I hold you responsible. I make no accusations, but I hold you responsible." Her manner was too funny. It was just as solemn as it used to be when she was a little stupid girl. She stared at me with her obtuse blue eyes, and I waited for her finger to go into her mouth as it used to do. I watched her curiously. She was so interesting to me as her mother's product, that I didn't think of answering her. "I always believed in you, Joan," she said. "I always believed in our friendship. If there's one thing I cannot forgive, it's insincerity and treachery." She swept to the door. She opened it gracefully, and with a toss of her smart veiled head, went out of it.

"Cat!" snapped Phyllis, as she disappeared. It was the finishing touch. It made all the past echo dreadfully. It made the whole thing incredibly real. It brought all that childhood of ours into focus. I closed my eyes dizzily. "Do go home, Phil," I murmured. "I truly can't stand any more."

"I can't, Joan. I'm afraid."

"He won't beat you a second time."

"He might." She was really frightened.

"Well, if you can't go home, go somewhere else, go to New York, Denver, Bermuda. There are lots of cosy refuges for runaway wives on this earth."

"I haven't any money."

"I'll lend you some."

"I couldn't let you. I couldn't."

"Well, then ——"

She hesitated. She was thinking rapidly. Of course she had known all the time she would have to stay with Pat till Binky came for her, or something wonderful happened.

"Couldn't you speak to Pat?" she asked at last.

"I?"

"Yes — he respects you. He admires you!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes — he said if it weren't for you he'd have horse-whipped Humphrey."

"I don't believe it!"

"It's true. He does admire you most awfully."

"Well — I refuse — anyhow. What could I say to him? It's preposterous!"

"You could say you thought — that considering we — Humphrey and I — loved each other, and that you didn't care, you and he ought to see us through."

I burst out laughing. I laughed very loud. I couldn't stop. She left me, still at it.

CHAPTER TEN

THERE doesn't seem to be any particular point in going over the history of the next three years. I want to skip all that. I don't like the subject very much. It's not interesting because no human passions were involved, and now, with the front page of *The Times* sprawling on the floor and the "Killed in Action Column" staring up at me, it all seems incredibly trivial and silly.

Having taken a high line with Binky and Binky's Destiny — spelled to me with a capital D — I found it wasn't possible to keep it high. Being a duchess doesn't constitute an occupation, and I am one of those people who ought to have an occupation. I should have made a good stenographer or cook or housemaid, a good anything that meant hard work. I haven't a *flair* for idleness. I don't loaf gracefully. After we had come back and moved in, there seemed very little for Binky and me to do, except amuse ourselves. We did that energetically enough, certainly. We did it sometimes together and sometimes separately. Binky didn't go to dances with me because he doesn't like dancing, or to what we called "Bohemian" parties, because he didn't like the long-haired lot. I didn't go racing with him because I don't like racing. But we lived in the same house most of the time, and we went at the same time to other people's houses. We had a number of common friends. In a

country where happy people do their best not to appear happy, and where loving couples succeed in pretending to dislike each other, we passed for almost anything that people might want to think about us. Aunt Cora had no fault to find with our behaviour. She was the nearest thing to a parent that we had in the country, and as long as our public performances were sufficiently dignified, she didn't seem to bother about what we did in private. She demanded, of course, a certain amount of attention. We faithfully ate her roast mutton once a week when we were in town. Indeed, Binky was very charming with her. He used to consult her on the problems of the Turf. She advised him about favourites. They used to hobnob together cosily in Cadogan Square over a couple of glasses of her oldest and nicest port, while I retired upstairs with Clem and Monica. You can fill in for yourself a good deal about me, when I tell you that I became quite habituated to the company of Clem and Monica. We were as thick as such thieves could be. We thieved together continually, poking about in funny corners after every kind of curious relationship and sensation. We did lots of forbidden vulgar things, and created confusion in a number of well-ordered bourgeois households and contented Bohemian camps. Clem used to like to pick men out of their comfortable little middle-class places and make them giddy in her whirl for a bit. It was rather cruel of her! She always dropped them quite suddenly when they showed signs of becoming nuisances. She and Phyllis are something alike, I suppose. Only Clem had never any ulterior motive. Her one reason for everything was boredom. I used to marvel at the way she escaped from her victims without even singeing her fingers. I quite frequently burnt mine. People con-

tinued to be disturbing to me. I never reached Clem's perfect detachment. Human beings failed to become for me grotesque or pretty mannikins. I was for ever seeing possibilities in the affair. It was all very stupid. I was looking for some really interesting person, and I used to go farther than Clem before I was tired. It took more to disgust me. And, as I say, I was continually getting scorched, so that I got to like being scorched. I felt cold and tired if I weren't playing with fire. I burned myself quite badly sometimes.

Joseph was the poet that Clem and Monica took up. They handed him over to me. He was half, or a quarter, Roumanian Jew, connected with some good people in the Balkans on his father's side, if you can speak of good people in the Balkans. I suppose there are some. At least his had been wild little princes once, so he told me. If so, I don't quite see where the Jew came in. However, his mother was Irish, and she had made him quite beautiful, beautiful enough to delude me, anyway. His nose was very slightly hooked. He had a fine head and eyes, very intelligent, luminous.

Binky didn't like him at all. His being a poet and a Jew was enough to explain that. If he had been an artist with a studio, and something to show on the walls, Binky wouldn't have minded so much. He had been to studios occasionally, and he acknowledged that that sort of thing might amuse some people. But a poet! There was positively no place in the world for a poet, unless it was a graveyard. He had heard of the Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey, and he was prepared to admit, on the evidence of tombstones and libraries, that there had been respectable persons, once upon a time, who wrote verse; but when a seedy-looking young man with a wild,

shy look in his eyes appeared from the Tottenham Court Road, waving ragged bits of paper, it was too much. Once he came upon Joseph reading aloud in the drawing-room to a group of us. Joseph was pale and calm through the ordeal, but Binky was quite flustered.

"My dear," he blurted out, after they had fled from him, "he's greasy — he's dirty! How can you?" He was speechless.

"He has a delightful mind," I argued, "if his finger-nails are black!"

"Good Lord!' said Binky. "Good Lord!"

"Would you rather not have him come here?"

"As for that, my dear, you must please yourself. If he amuses you —— Just so long as you don't ask me to sit at the table with him. Ugh!"

Joseph didn't amuse me. It was something more intriguing and painful than that. Ruffles amused me when he had his innings. Joseph disturbed me. He suggested to me ambitions and regrets. He made me want to cut loose. He held out a promise of a beautiful, brilliant abstraction called "truth."

I'm sure Binky thought my interest in him was vulgar, but I am not ashamed of it. I am only ashamed of not seeing it through; of not, in very plain language, having made him a friend. I have called my affair with him my last adventure, because it was my last journey after an idea, the last time that I showed any courage on behalf of an impulse. He was strange to me, and for a time wonderful, and I gave myself extravagantly to his strangeness. I spent hours with him every day, listening to his curious poems and his more curious talk. I dropped my friends and my amusements in order to be with him, and I forgave his ragged hair and unwashed

hands because of his beautiful ideas. I don't know whether he was a genius or not. If being very poor and very irregular in one's habits, if having lots of enemies and a small crowd of idealistic adorers, and no public for one's poems, if these are signs of genius, he certainly had them. But I don't know. I don't know anything about geniuses. I only know that Joseph used to say things that illumined the world strangely, that gave one a sense of something more than reality, and that his poems disturbed me. He made me feel myself a stupid fool, and I clung to him and lived for a time on the stimulus of his magnetism.

But I overdid it. I gave him money. He must have laid up quite a balance in the bank during those days. It seems incredible. I can't for the life of me get back into that state of mind, but I remember that I had the idea of adopting him, and of mentioning him in my will. I went to him prepared to suggest it. I actually sought him out in his cave in the north of London, with the purpose of discussing it. I remember perfectly hurrying up through the Park to the Marble Arch, and taking a bus from there. I remember the look of the streets and every incident of my mad journey, but I can't remember very well what I felt like. I don't know why I took a bus instead of a taxi — to put myself more on a plane with him, I suppose. Oxford Street was extraordinarily full of people, all spending money. Joseph's poverty and arrogance distressed and pleased me. He always accepted a loan with a furious, resentful air.

I walked the last part of the way. He lived in a block of dingy flats, at the top of the house. The door of the building was opened. The stuffy vestibule was empty. Nevertheless it seemed a feat of great difficulty and dar-

ing to turn into that gaping door between the two sets of soiled, flanking windows. I climbed the five flights of stairs in the semi-darkness, unmolested except by the smells of cheap cooking and bad sewage. The landing at the top of the stairs was very untidy. Bits of dirty paper lay there.

I rang his bell and rang again, and then found a key hanging on a nail by the door, and with it let myself in. At the end of the narrow passage another door was open, revealing the gruesome interior of an untidy bedroom. I was staggered for a moment by the sight of lumped-up bedding and a broken water-jug. The front room was bare of both comforts and horrors. I sat down there on one of the straight chairs. No trimmings in the room — no colour — Joseph didn't like prettiness. I sat looking out of the window. It was beginning to rain. The broad façade of a large warehouse cut by square windows loomed opposite. He had told me that he had chosen the flat because of the exceeding beauty of the warehouse. I couldn't see it, but I wanted to.

He kept me waiting an hour. I had written that I was coming and expected to find him waiting for me. He gave me heaps of time to come to my senses. I sat there in a fever. I don't know why. I must have been mad, but there it is. I sat there waiting.

He had never said he loved me. We had never indulged in the obvious. That was, I suppose, the trouble. His reticence had too disastrously touched my imagination and piqued my curiosity. My only ground for seeking him out, and expecting to be welcome, was that he had come to me constantly for three months, and that we were not bored.

At last, after waiting an hour, I went into the other

room and made his bed. I wonder what Binky would say if I told him I once made up the bed of that objectionable poet? I was busy sweeping the floor when he came in.

"That damned printer——" he began, showing no surprise at what I was doing. We went into the front room and made tea, boiling the water over the gas.

"Come with me to Budapest," he flung out presently.

"I'd like to." The idea seemed very attractive. I remember wondering whether one couldn't, in a disguise, take the road with him for a little while.

"I'm going next month."

"It would be fun." I was tempted. "But you'd have more fun without me."

"Not if you didn't mind being treated with a certain simplicity."

"I should love it! I'm bored." I laughed, feeling all too serious.

I waited, but he went on gulping down his tea. Having finished the large cupful, he sat looking at me with his shy, searching eyes. Then he came and kissed me. It was the first time he had ever kissed me. His were strange, quivering kisses.

I gave myself up to them, wondering, while he crushed my face in his hands and hurt it with his lips, wondering why it was that decent people had in them no fire and no poetry. It occurred to me that he had learned this mode of love-making in the gutter. I tore myself from him at last, and went to the window and looked down into the muddy street.

"Well?" he brought out curtly.

"Well?" I echoed.

"You're too dreadfully civilized," he muttered.

I saw that I had come there to find out just that very thing, and that my other idea was an excuse.

"I would like to help you," I said, "and then drop it." He grunted, vaguely irritated.

"What do you want most in the world?"

"A thousand pounds," he shouted, laughing.

"Very well." I turned and watched him. I saw him weighing it in his mind.

"And then?" he asked curiously.

"Ah! then I shall have you off my conscience." I left him with that. I don't remember anything else. I actually did send him the money and he took it. I am still wondering about his genius. If, in another hundred years, he is admitted as such, I suppose I shall look down from Heaven and feel it was not quite shameful. I didn't see him again. He went, I suppose, to Budapest, and did himself very well. That's all there was to the Joseph affair. I put it down as it happened.

It's curious what people will do when they feel secure. We were annoyed with the world for working so smoothly, and we tried to upset it a little, or at least to make it appear a little upset. We enjoyed doing things backwards and upside down. Our amusement consisted chiefly, as far as I remember it, in, figuratively speaking, standing on our heads and walking on our hands. I remember introducing an era of Chinese customs as regarded meals. My dinners for some months began with sweets and ended with boiled rice, as theirs do. I had the happy idea one day at lunch. We didn't go in for chopsticks, but we had one dish for each course set in the middle of the table, and all dipped into it with long spoons and forks. Eight was the largest number one could manage that way. People liked to come to my octettes.

Chronologically it comes in about the same time as the death of Louise's little girl. It was just after that scene in Joseph's room, that she began to write to me those letters that make me think now that she was beginning to find herself during the last year of her life. One can't somehow get away from phrases like "finding one's self." They don't mean very much, but what else is one to call that growth in Louise's mind? I wrote to her when little Lou died, and she answered me and went on writing.

Her letters were extravagant, of course, and affected. Their affectation nearly smothered the other thing, the real little interest she was beginning to feel in human beings. Now and then she gave me little bits about quaint people she was meeting. Once she wrote about a sunset in the harbour of Yokohama. She spoke of the limp sails of the sampans like the broken wings of birds that had lighted there to die. She didn't say that she felt like one herself; that was what struck me. It was the thing she might so obviously have said that her little reticence seemed portentous, and it was queer, too, for Louise to notice a sunset. She had never been sentimental. Sometimes she alluded to Jim. Jim was so awfully sweet. She was sure of his love. That had all too many echoes, had been said by her too many times, but then she followed it up by announcing that she had never understood before how nervous he was. She said that sometimes she was frightened, and wondered if there was insanity in his family. Shortly after this she announced she was going to see his mother when they got round to Italy. And she did go. She left him in Rome and went back there alone. She wrote to me that she'd had a long talk with his mother, and she didn't tell me one word of what was said between them. I gather, how-

ever, that the older woman didn't encourage her in the belief that Jim might some day go off his head. I wish she had. It would have been good for them both if Louise had been frightened. I expect his mother felt that too, afterwards. She, too, wrote to me once, because, I suppose, it had happened in my house. She wrote to ask where he had disappeared to. I couldn't tell her. I don't know whether she tried to track him down or not. I don't know how much she knew or suspected. She couldn't have heard the facts from any one. No one ever knew the facts but Binky and Britton and myself and Claire Hobbes. The other people in the house could only suspect, and they, I feel sure, never voiced their suspicions. Binky saw them all off that next morning, and must have made it clear to them that this thing must for ever be a mystery to them, and dumbness concerning it, a responsibility for ever.

Of course if Britton hadn't been there I don't suppose we should have hushed it up with such absolute success. He managed that part somehow. I don't know what he did — but I seem to have an impression of him, an overpowering silent figure guarding the castle and all of us who were huddled in it. There was just that little notice that Claire Hobbes wrote out for me, saying that Mrs. James Van Orden of Iroquois, U.S.A., had died very suddenly from a heart attack at Saracens, on the 10th of September, 1912.

We couldn't, of course, muzzle the American press, but we managed to put them quite on the wrong track, and all their idiotic stuff didn't do any harm.

"Let them rave about you and your friendship, and the tragedy of this sudden illness, and the heart-trouble in her poor family as much as they like," said Claire.

"It keeps people from asking questions. That's all we want. It covers him up and his flight. Let them pile it on — the more the better."

Claire saw me through those days. She stayed alone with Binky and me for a fortnight. And she kept Britton there for a week, in the face of a clamouring War Office. I don't know what awful things happened to the poor old army. It was just the time of that Morocco business. But Claire said Britton would make a fourth at bridge, and so she kept him, and the three of them sat up with me all night, for six nights, playing bridge. It was good of them. I could lie down in the day-time with the windows open and the sun shining in. The sun did shine. That was good too. I'm grateful to God for that week of sun!

And I'm grateful to Ruffles too. He saw Jim as far as Paris. He stuck to him until he was quite certain that he wasn't going to blow his brains out, and then he came and told me how he'd seen the last of him. I don't know that his going off with Jim did any good. Jim probably wouldn't have done anything violent, anyway. All his violence was spent. He was already dead — and if he had wanted to kill himself, it would have been just as well to let him. But I'm grateful to Ruffles. He protected Jim. He kept the reporters off him, and hid him from view till he could hide himself.

You see how it is that I've come to like Claire and Binky. They played up so awfully well. I shall never forget the very casual way in which Binky arranged for the burial, and Claire saw to the laying-out of that poor dead Louise, and the packing up of her clothes and the sending back of her jewellery to Mrs. Bowers. And then, you know, Binky actually went to America to see

Mrs. Bowers. It was only that that stopped her from coming over. After the third cable from her, we saw that nothing could stop her but somebody's going. We sat with it spread out before us, two pages of cablegram. It was addressed to Jim.

"Must know details. Greatly distressed that you won't bring body home. Am told cannot force you to do so by law. Don't understand. Propose to sail on the *Mauretania* next Saturday. Will the Duchess receive me?" And a lot more. This had arrived the day Ruffles got back from Paris. I stared at the words: "Will the Duchess receive me?"

"What does she mean?" I asked. "Who is she talking about? Receive her how?"

"She means you, dear," said Binky, as though he were talking to a sick little child. "She means, will you let her come here?"

He put a hand on my shoulder and rubbed his face against mine, as we stared at the cable.

"Oh!" I said.

"Nothing will stop her but somebody's going," said Claire.

"I'm going," said Binky.

"Then who will stay with me?" I asked. I must have been ill, I suppose.

"Who would you like?"

"I don't know." I wondered about it. "I'd like Claire and Aunt Cora," I said after a minute.

"That will be all right, then," said Binky, moving away a little, but I remember holding on to him, so he sat down again, taking my hand. We were on the terrace in the sun. Binky was very nice to me during those days. He used to tie the towel round my head when it ached,

and he could pull it tighter than any one else. And he would rub my feet when they were cold. And he brought me my tea, taking the tray from the servant at the door of my room. I couldn't bear servants to come into my room. It was such an effort to look at them. But I liked having Binky there. He did many little things for me, and then he did that big thing. He went to Iroquois and saw Mrs. Bowers and my father. He kept Mrs. Bowers away and he brought my father back with him. So you see, he must have managed it very well. My father hadn't been to see us since we had left Iroquois three years before. It was the nicest thing Binky could have done — bringing my father to me, himself.

I don't know how much Binky told him. He may have told him everything; I mean he may have told him exactly what happened. I don't know. Anyway, he gave him to understand that he, Binky, was very much frightened about me, and my father came. I believe Binky thought I might go insane. He need not have been so frightened, but I'm glad in a way that he was. It showed me that he was, after all, vitally concerned in my welfare. We all seem to have been frightened. I was afraid of my father. I heard the car come up to the door, and I went out into the hall to meet them, feeling that I should faint with terror. I noticed how tall my father was, taller even than Binky, and how white his hair. He looked for a moment like a stranger — and I thought, "He has come from Iroquois. He has come, but the distance between us is too great. The separation has been too much; my faithlessness to profound. He can't bridge it. It's impossible." And then he took me in his arms. "Joan, my darling," he said, and I knew all at once that I was

wrong, and I knew, too, what he would do for us. He would demand that we should repay his trust in us.

He stayed a month, and I have a feeling that Saracens, in all the years of its existence, has never held within its great dramatic walls such a curious piece of time, a month of such pregnant stillness. It was during those days as if we existed in his belief, and as though, still holding us up to it, he freed us from ourselves, our vulgarity and our shame.

He knew the truth about us, and I felt that I was learning it from him for the first time.

There was no one in the house but Aunt Cora, my father and Binky and me. I have no memory of how the days passed, but I remember one warm sunny day that Aunt Cora sat in the walled garden knitting, my father beside her. She had a cloak round her shoulders and a rug over her knees, and her knitting-needles flashed in the sun. Binky and I watched them from the bottom of the garden.

It was when Binky looked at me and said, "We shall be old some day, and what shall we be like?" that I realized what had been going on in him as in myself. We'd been thinking, and that was wonderful in itself, and I saw too that we'd been thinking honestly — he on his part and I on mine.

"You know," I said to Binky, "he has saved us."

"Yes, I know," said Binky simply.

I can't explain my father's visit, I can only leave it to you.

Last August, when war was declared, he wanted me to come to America with the children, but I said I couldn't go so far away from Binky when he was fighting over

there in Flanders. My father must have taken that as the fulfilment of his prophecy. I suppose it was. Anyway, I'm glad to think of him contented again about me. He is an old man now. I imagine him playing patience every night, and thinking, not too vividly, about Binky and the war.

Phyllis wasn't in Iroquois when Binky was there, that last time, but it wouldn't have mattered if she had been. I don't think he ever wanted to see her again after that 10th of September.

There isn't any one that he cares for in that way now. He isn't the sort that cares for women very much. There have only been the three of us, Claire and Phyllis and I; and strangely enough, I remain near to him. There must be something in marriage, even a marriage such as ours. It lasts out and holds together when other things fly apart. Binky likes me best now, and depends on me for the kind of help that he needs out there. He wants letters, lots of letters, from me. If he doesn't hear twice a week he thinks himself very much neglected. He likes me to tell him all about Arch and Humpy and the dogs and the servants and the weather and the look of the pastures and the condition of his Highland cattle and what horses there are left. His face is old now, it has the war written on it, but his heart has become the heart of a child. Poor darling!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

NOW that I've got back to the beginning, the night of the 10th of September, 1913, I find that I've told you all sorts of things, almost everything of importance, except just what happened that night. I'm afraid, in telling the story, I've got into rather a muddle. It's so difficult to keep distinct what I felt and knew at various times, and what I feel and know now. Now the war is on us, and my chief feeling is one of fear, not any definite fear of Zeppelins or invasions, but a vague, dreadful fear, an acute sense of insecurity. The world is shaking, and its convulsions give one a feeling of having, to put it vulgarly, gone dotty. It's as though I saw all the tables and chairs in my room moving about and falling over. Everything that was stable and was made to hang on to, and sit down upon, and lean against, is lurching. The great business of life seems to be to sit tight, but one has a suspicion that even the law of gravity may be loosed and that we shall find ourselves falling off the earth. Before the 4th of August, people in their secure little houses were enjoying their miseries and making capital out of their difficulties, and splendidly gambling on the future — the dark future that seemed so possible. Now it is all changed. It appears that the conduct of life is largely a matter of unconscious calculations. One says good-bye and calculates that the chances are a hundred to one, that one will meet this friend again. But when I said good-bye to Binky the other day at the

one o'clock from Victoria, the chances were a hundred to one against his coming back. It's a curious thing to have all the mathematics of life upset. It makes one feel like being in a mad-house. The laughter of Arch and Humpy rising in shrieks from the gardens seems incredible and wonderful. The security of childhood becomes the most precious thing on earth.

So you see how difficult it is to remember what my feelings were in 1913. I have told you about how the American quartette descended on us at Saracens, and I've told you about my clairvoyant moment at dinner, when I saw through them all as though an X-ray machine had been turned on them. I don't want to go into all the complex impressions of their personalities and the queer, surcharged atmosphere that their minds altogether there, created in the house, because Louise's wretched mind dominated them all for me as the evening went on, just as her voice drowned their voices and her tragedy eclipsed their little troubles. Phyllis and Binky may have been under a strain; no doubt they were. Pat may have been uncomfortable, though I don't believe he was. Claire, undoubtedly, drew a certain sinister satisfaction from Phil's helplessness. But all those things scarcely count at all compared to the dreadful tension stretched over Louise and Jim. I had a feeling of something drawn round them, very tight, enclosing them in a space like the inside of a balloon, where the gases of their misery and distrust swelled to bursting. And the final act was just the bursting of a bubble that had been strained too long. And it seems, now, scarcely more important in the sum total of the world's tragedy than the bursting of a toy balloon, buyable for a penny, and in competition with the roar of armaments, scarcely more noisy.

And yet, if we are immortals, all of us, then it was, of course, much more than that, and the amount of pain that was mine afterward, and the cowardly giving in to the hopeless boredom of life that resulted from it, all that will be balanced up against me, I suppose. I suppose my giving in to Ruffles, when I knew there was nothing in it, will be laid up against me. I don't know. I don't care very much. It's so difficult to decide whether that sort of thing really matters. To my father it would matter so terribly, and to Binky it would — it did — matter so little. I could never tell from his manner whether he accepted it in knowledge or was altogether unaware. But it's curious that Louise should have accused me of the thing that hadn't happened and was not going to, because my father came to see us.

We never used the room in the Round Tower, except as a kind of museum or rubbish-heap. I don't believe any one had used it for anything else during the last hundred years. I believe it was the original dining-hall in the days when the tower was the whole of the castle. The fireplace was large enough to roast a sheep in and had old iron cranes and hooks fastened into the stonework. The walls were rough stone too, discoloured by smoke. There was scarcely any furniture in it beyond a couple of old settees and some deep, ragged chairs, and those cases of relics — relics from all sorts of wars in all sorts of countries. I never took any interest in them, and only remember a medley of helmets and swords and chain-armour and queer coats and horns and plumes. I have always had a feeling that there must be, among all those things, some scalps and teeth and bones, but doubtless I'm wrong, and Binky's family has always been too refined to bring home bits of its enemies. In any case,

I came to dislike the place. The windows were small and deep-set, with iron gratings over them suggestive of a dungeon, and all those trophies combined to oppress me with the weight of too much family history whenever I went there. I thought of poor little Arch and Humpy inheriting the peculiarities of those grotesque plumes and gloves. It was opposite the wing where the gun-rooms are, and where Binky spent a good deal of his time, but I scarcely ever went there, and never sat there. I don't suppose Jim would have thought of it as a possible place to hide in if Phyllis, after going rapturously over the whole place, hadn't pounced on this as a perfect spot for ghost stories. It was — and we actually did spend the hours between eleven and one there, on the night before, the night of the 9th of September. That was the first night of their visit, they only stayed two. Still, I don't understand just how it was that Jim went there. It was curious his finding the way. One had to go down long corridors and through numerous doors, and down and up several little flights of stairs. The very fact that he did slink away so far, shows how he was feeling. A dog, if it wants to hide, will take a lot of trouble to get to a safe place, I suppose. It must have seemed to him that it was only by going through all those doors and shutting them carefully after him, that he could shut out the sound of Louise's voice. That was evidently his motive. I don't for a moment believe that he had any idea of blowing his brains out. He was fond of guns and revolvers. He and Binky had spent two hours comparing notes in the gun-room that same afternoon. I remember noticing, when I came on him there by the great fireplace, that there were several guns lying about. He had evidently been rummaging in the room opposite,

and had brought them across where there was more light. Why the round-room was lighted I don't know. The servants must have wanted to anticipate every caprice of the fair-haired American lady. Anyhow they had lit the iron lamps and built up a big log fire, though I don't suppose even their unfortunate zeal had led them to put the drinks in readiness on the chance of our coming. I rather think Jim must have asked for the whisky. That's another funny thing — he always hated whisky — and so, when I came on him sunk in an old chair by the fire with a gun across his knees, I noticed at once the decanter and the empty glass and the full syphon. I noticed everything except the revolver beside the tray at his elbow.

The impression that Louise and Jim had made on me when they arrived was the more painful because so unexpected. She was more than ill at ease. Her effort was more than just an effort to behave well before a number of strange, important people. It was an effort to prove to me just how completely successful and contented she was with Jim. And his was an effort not to give her away, and not to be ashamed of her.

I had not seen them for three years, and her letters had made me think they were happy together. I don't mean that she lied to me. It must have been that she really thought they were happier. When you remember the rows they had had, it's understandable that she should think the comparative peace of their travels was happiness. She had been making love to him after her fashion for a year, and she felt almost sure of him this time, sure enough, anyway, to bring him to Saracens, unless, indeed, her coming there was to try him. How do I know? How can I tell? I've tried to think it out,

but it's all too difficult. I can see that her grotesque vivacity may have been put on just to hide her misery, but I can't tell with what feelings she came to us or with what intention. Sometimes I think that the invitation, with what it promised of grandeur, and to her it did seem grand, was too much of a temptation, and that she was wretchedly torn between her desire to visit a duke in his castle and her unwillingness to throw Jim and me together. If that is the case, then I am all the more sorry for her. To think of her coming there all sore with the anticipation of the jealousy she knew would torture her, and yet so dreadfully eager to be for a moment in our supposedly great world, that is almost too painful for me. I can't bear to think of the woman that was Jim's wife being the prey to such feelings and the victim of the least dignified, for her jealousy wasn't a contemptible or silly thing like her ignorant snobbishness. I would rather think that she came just to show me how much Jim loved her, and to suggest that we might be friends again. I should like still more, to think that she really felt drawn to me at last for myself, and that her coming there was a warm, free impulse. But I don't know. I shall never be able to think it out. It is all too blurred by the horror of the outcome.

It was half-past eleven on that last night, the second night, when I began my search for him, and it must have taken me ten minutes to find him, perhaps fifteen. I had been to the billiard-room and the dining-room and the library and to Binky's study, as well as along the terrace and out into the park, but it struck me as absurd and useless to look for him out of doors, and I hadn't spent long there, only long enough to be chilled and to come in by the south door shivering. I calcu-

lated that he had been there alone two hours, for he had left the drawing-room at a quarter to ten, only a few minutes after the men joined us there. He had stayed just long enough to see Louise curve her long neck, twist her hands into a becoming attitude, and look up at Britton with an idiotic smile. It's curious how many curves Louise had. She was all arches and curves from the top of her head to the instep of her foot, and when she roused herself to an effort, these curves accentuated themselves suddenly all at once, as though worked all together by a spring. She would arch her eyebrows and purse her lips and curl her fingers, and do something funny with her toes, that made her high-heeled little feet look conspicuous. That night everything about her seemed exaggerated. She seemed bent on overdoing it. Her dress was like a fancy dress. It had wings and panniers. It was a quite wonderful dress of a queer old-rose and gold and crimson, cut no lower than Claire's black velvet, but seeming indecent because her shoulders were so thin and her breast so flat. Her slippers were gold and there was a crimson rose in her corsage. She put us all in the shade. We looked and felt dowdy beside her gorgeousness, just as we looked and felt awkward in the face of her amazingly varied manner, just as we were all struck dumb by her shrill volubility. It was impossible to stop her. I did my best. Even before Jim and the men came in I had been doing my best. It made me unhappy. I blushed for her, and I was angry. Clem's little smile and Claire's icy detachment and Molly's blank amazement and Phil's wicked way of egging her on, made me unhappy. I gave myself up to her during our feminine half-hour over coffee. I tried to get her to

talk entirely to me. I tried to talk myself and drown her, but it was no good. Some ridiculous foreign prince they had met in Paris had turned her little head. He had asked them to his château in Normandy, he had given them parties at Arminnville, he had advised her about dressmakers. She would have liked to follow his advice about dresses, but Jim had limited her expenditure. There was an evening-cloak by Poiret she had pined for and literally wept for, but Jim hadn't let her buy it. She wasn't exactly peevish about Jim's hard-heartedness, but she suggested that it was very saintly of her not to be. And she eyed our uninteresting frocks with tactful, gentle contempt. The wings of hers fell in loose folds down her restless back, and she took them on either side in her fingers, and stood poised before us looking down on us with her pouting, piquant little face simply coated with smug self-satisfaction. Perhaps she was miserable even then, but it seemed quite clear to us all at that time, that she took great pleasure in knowing that she was the best-dressed woman in the room. Poor Louise! I wonder if it hadn't been for the prince and the Paris dressmakers whether she might not have been saved — to grow up. I don't know. After all, the effect that Britton and Binky and Ruffles, and particularly and fatally that Britton had on her, was quite another thing from the *affaire* of the prince and the dressmakers. If she had come straight to us from little Lou's deathbed, I expect she would have bridled with the business of fascination for Britton. She had seen his pictures in the papers too many times, had heard his name on too many lips ever to dream of taking him as a human being.

It doubtless seemed a miracle to her that a man who

had already made history to such an extent, and who was spoken of with awe even in America, should be bending over the back of her chair. I don't blame her for being thrilled about him. It was rather charming of her to feel like that, at least the youth and enthusiasm at the bottom of it were charming, but it was the dizzy play of her egoism in its vain little effort to subjugate him, or at least to strain itself up to an equally important height that she might be on a level with him, which was so pitiful.

He was the first to come in through the dining-room door, and she, all of a sudden, went into a marvellous set of curves, as I've said, and tipping her head backward and to one side, she shot a brilliant look through her lowered lids and screamed out:

"Oh, Lord Britton, do come and tell me the rest of that story about South Africa!" And then she laughed nervously.

He obeyed, of course, in that gloomy way of his, and his face, which is always stern, didn't give him away. He met her just as he meets all the horrors of battlefields. It was no more disagreeable than a machine-gun. He would walk across a bit of open, raked by a Maxim, quite as deliberately. At least one thinks of him like that, but maybe he runs — like any sane person. At any rate, he didn't run from Louise. He stood quite stolidly while she rained her silly words on him. He bowed now and then, and occasionally he said, "Ah, indeed!" and occasionally, "No, I believe not." And his eyebrows never quivered from their perfect deference, while she smiled with all her little teeth, and shrilled up and down the scale of her bright American voice.

"I'm told you hate women. Is it true? Don't say it's true. Why should you hate us, poor us?" She gave little tosses to her head to emphasize her words.

"On the contrary."

"How nice of you to say that." With a special stress on the nice. "It must be so wonderful"—another crescendo—"to be a General and command an army." A sudden drop. "Only don't you worry about the men that are killed? I should worry dreadfully." A long cadence in a wailing tone. "I should lie awake nights. Does it depress you horribly?"

"No, I believe not.'

"I'm so disappointed not to see you in uniform." Voice dropped. "Joan ought to have asked you to put on yours just for us poor little backwoods Americans." Voice rising again. "I would so like to see your medals. You've got lots, I know. The King decorated you last year, didn't he? I remember reading about it in the papers. Do you know, you're always in the papers. In the States, I mean. Every one will be frightfully jealous to hear that I've met you. I had no idea we'd have such a chance."

"You're very kind."

"Which do you like best, Africa, England or India? You've never been to America, have you? You should come. We'd so love to have you. We'd hang all the city with flags if you came to Iroquois. Wouldn't we, Jim?"

"Of course." The tone of Jim's on top of her wavy soprano voice startled me. It was thick and brutal. It was more like the bark of animal rage and torment than like human speech.

"Louise," I put in, "would you like some bridge?"

"No, no, my dear. I'd much rather just talk to Lord Britton — if he isn't too awfully bored." Then very, very archly: "Are you, Lord Britton?"

"On the contrary."

"You go and play bridge or billiards, there's a dear. We're all right. We'll just sit and talk. I'll take care of him for you," and with a flourish of lace and silk and wings and panniers, she settled herself down in front of the fire, lifting her poor, pretty head with its glinting, crinkly hair, tilting it far back, and pouting up at him. It's incredible that she shouldn't have realized what a spectacle she was making of herself. It exposed her, as if she had stripped naked and danced before us.

The sight of her exposure was too much for Jim. He turned off with a groan, giving me, as he slunk out of the room, one sight of his face all flushed with shame, his soft curly mouth twisted into a snarl, his eyes black with humiliation. I don't know whether he had been drinking much before that or not. I hadn't noticed at dinner. I had been too taken up with the curious vision of them all, Phyllis and Claire and Pat and Binky, but now they all seemed unimportant except Louise. I bundled them off to the billiard-room as soon as I could. If Phil hadn't been so obstinate I could have done it sooner, but she insisted on staying to watch Louise's antics, and she got Binky to go to the piano and made Ruffles dance with her on a square of carpet, and when she was tired of that she suggested, just, I'm sure, to shock Louise, that we play musical chairs, or what she called "Going to Jerusalem," and Ruffles wick-

edly backing her up, and she got us all prancing and whirling round until even Claire grew hot and breathless. Ruffles broke two chairs, Molly tore her petticoat, Pat upset a lamp. It was all quite like Iroquois, and I romped and plunged about, sitting in people's laps and falling over the furniture with my mind all the time horridly fixed on Jim, and on Louise, who was sitting there by the fire ogling Britton.

It didn't occur to me that she was watching me to see if I would follow Jim. I hadn't the faintest idea of keeping away from Jim to please her. I was strangely troubled about him and I wanted to go after him, but I felt that the kindest thing I could do for him was to stick by her. I wasn't afraid of Britton, but I was unwilling to leave her to the tender mercies of Phyllis, so I stayed in the room, I stayed until her laughter sounded in my ears like the voice of a soul in torment. Maybe I imagine that because of what I know now. At any rate, I'm sure she must have been getting tired of keeping it up and she must have been getting very nervous about Jim, and I can quite believe that by eleven-thirty she was slightly hysterical. I heard her shriek:

"Never go to Court! Don't you really? Unless what? Oh, unless your presence is required. You mean unless the King invites you!" And I could stand it no longer. I told Phyllis she had had her way long enough, and if the men didn't get in a soothing game of billiards they'd none of them sleep. I tore Britton away from Louise's clutch. She relinquished him with a sigh and a dazzling smile. I saw the four men out of the room with Phyllis and Claire; and then I bolted, leaving Louise to dear old Molly.

I wish I had not gone out of doors to look for Jim. It was very cold and damp outside, and the wind blew my hair about. I always get unnaturally white when I'm cold, and probably I looked strange and more wild than usual when she found me with him. She was in the room two minutes after me. A horrible instinct must have been in her to bring her straight to the spot.

"Jim," I had said in the door, and when he didn't look up or answer I went across to him. His breathing was so heavy that I thought he was asleep. The old lanterns in the wall didn't give much light, and the fire had burned into a low bed of glowing embers. "Jim," I said again, leaning over him. He looked up at me, and I saw that he was befuddled. The expression of his face frightened me.

"What's the matter?" he asked thickly. "You ought to leave me alone."

My idea was to get him to come back with me to the others or to Louise, at least to the inhabited part of the house, and eventually to bed. I put my hand on his shoulder.

"Jim, dear," I said. "Come along. It's horrid here."

"Come where?"

"Come back to the billiard-room."

"I'm too drunk. Leave me alone."

"No, I can't. I'm unhappy about you. Come with me."

"I'm too drunk. I'm not unhappy. I'm only drunk."

I tried to urge him to get up.

"Come, dear," I said again, then I heard quick breathing behind me.

"Oh!" gasped Louise. "Oh!"

I turned and found her there in the door, staring. She ran forward and grabbed my arm and pulled me away from him. Jim got up quickly, flinging the gun off his knees. It fell with a thud.

"Oh, how dare you — how dare you? I knew. I knew where you'd gone. I knew it."

"What in hell are you doing here?" he muttered.

She paid no attention to him.

"I've known all along," she screamed at me. "You've done your best to spoil my life. You've always been trying to get him away from me." I had retreated to the door after she flung me away from him, and she stood now between me and him, but staring at me. We made a triangle — but she faced me.

"Louise," I said, in what sounded to myself like a whisper. "Be careful. Look at Jim!"

"I don't want to look at Jim — I want to look at you. I want to know what you mean by making love to my husband and lying to me. Your face gives you away. You're white as a ghost. You know you're a bad woman. You — you're heartless, you're depraved. I hate you. You've done nothing but lie to me for years and years."

"Hold your tongue!" shouted Jim.

"I won't hold my tongue. She's in love with you and you are with her. You're lovers. She was leaning over you. She was going to kiss you. Do you think I can't see? Look at her face. I hate you both. But you're not the only lover she's had — don't you believe it. She's had ——"

that man she calls Ruffles——" She got no further. Her fury had somehow drawn my eyes to her. I didn't see what he was doing. I only heard a sharp noise and saw her jerk forward and fall in a queer heap. Then I heard Jim say, very stupidly, with the revolver dangling in his hand:

"Shut up, damn you! Shut up!"

I remember straightening her head and her legs. She had fallen so unattractively. I took her head in my lap. She gave little shudders and moved her eyes and tried to swallow. I don't know how soon she died.

It was Binky who came, and he brought Claire afterwards to help him. They carried Louise upstairs between them. No one else saw anything, and even Phyllis has kept still about what she knows.

THE END.